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**Sports activities’ influence on students’ identities and social interactions**

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**Abstract**

The concept of social identity in student lives is broad. There are several major factors that influence students’ identities, and Author has chosen to explore profounder one of them - sports activities. This Thesis is a study about students’ relationships with sports activities, where the main goal is to determine how the sports activities are affecting students' identities and social interactions.

In order to investigate this topic, the Thesis consists of four major theories and also concepts that are used in order to analyze quantitative data and qualitative data, and to find out if there is a pattern between students’ identity development, social interactions and sports activities. The data consists of 112 survey responses and 9 self-narratives from students that are in the age group between 18 and 27 years, and who exercise regularly. Furthermore, the main theories in Author’s Thesis are: Social identity theory, Interpersonal and collective identities theory, Student development theory and concepts of Identity and Consumption. This Thesis has been divided in two big parts in order to analyze the problem formulation. These are respectively: Theoretical knowledge and Analysis of the empirical data.

In this Thesis, the Author found out that there exists a pattern between students’ devotion to exercise and that of their parents. Moreover, the students’ benefits from the sports activities are: improvements in mood and attitudes, social skill improvements, expansion of social networks and personality developments. All of these benefits demonstrate the ways in which sports activities affect students’ identities and social interactions.

This Thesis can become a stepping-stone to further research in the area of student identity development, where other researchers can study which other afterschool activities have affected students’ identities, and how these other activities affect students’ social skills. Therefore, this Thesis leaves an opportunity to further exploration of the topic.

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# Introduction

This Thesis will be a study of how students are constructing their identity and creating their social interactions with the help of sports activities in order to find out how these activities have created students identity and lifestyles. Being a student myself for the past six years, I have come to think back on how I was feeling when I was not training, but just sitting in my room, going to school, studying and with almost no interaction with other people. Sadly, to say, I had the same routine every day, and in the end, I had no energy left for any activities with my course mates. Nevertheless, I decided that it cannot continue that way, so I decided to start exercising, and everything changed. I felt like a different person, and all of a sudden, I had so many new friends. I felt more energetic and communicative. Exercising boosted up my self-esteem and gave me a more positive outlook on life.

This is only my experience, and the results I got from exercising shows only a bit of the general results that people can get from exercising regularly[[1]](#footnote-1). It is very possible that other students experience different changes in their lives, e.g., feeling more confident, relaxed, outgoing etc. Every person is different, and so are their personalities, goals in life, and the results they wish to achieve from exercising. That is why I decided to explore this phenomenon more thoroughly in order to find out if sports activities affect students' identities and if it helps them with their social interactions. Therefore, in my Thesis I will focus only on students who exercise with frequency at least once a week, no matter if it is dancing, running, boxing or skiing. In my study, I intend to ask students about their relationship with sports in the past and in the present by gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, about which you can read more thoroughly in the methodology section.

Another reason why I have chosen identity as my main topic is, because a lot of students create their identity also throughout their time in university[[2]](#footnote-2), which is where they realize what kind of person they wish to be in the future, and I want to find out if exercising plays a role in this process. I want to know what consequences sports activities create in students’ lives; especially, how these activities form students’ identity and if they stimulate social interactions. I consider this topic relevant, because it is important to help students evolve in the best possible ways. With my Thesis I want to explore if exercising might be the key to providing students with a better focus on their studies, more cheerful attitude; I want to find out if exercising can help students to gain a broader network of contacts for their future. I am not saying that all of this could be achieved only through exercising, but in this Thesis I want to explore if the sports activities could play an important part in student identity and social skills development.

In this Thesis I will investigate how students are experiencing exercising, and what changes have they experienced in comparison to the period when they were not so active. This information is important, because it will provide me with different answers on how students perceive exercising and how big of a role it plays in their life. Maybe some of them do not even consider exercising effects a big deal; maybe these effects from exercising have always been a part of their life. However, there also might be students that exercise only to be accepted in a particular group or to keep themselves in shape. For now, these are only guesses, but that’s why I want to research this topic up-close with students in order to find out all these different motives and benefits that could hide behind sports activities, and to see if exercising has benefitted them or not. Through this knowledge I want to find out what sports activities and exercising means to the students, and do they feel like these activities are forming their way of being – identity.

To help me with this research as one of my main theories I will use Tajfel's social identity theory, Chickering's theory of student identity development, and others that you can read about in the Methodology part. The results of my Thesis will not only give more information for students, but it could also provide people in the fitness business world with a better understanding of students' reasons for exercising, and give them more ideas on how to attract students to visit their gyms or sports clubs, or it can provide some ideas to universities on how to get more participants in their sports teams.

# Problem formulation

* How are sports activities affecting students’ identity and their social interactions?

In order to answer my problem formulation I will explore several theories regarding personal identity, social identity, social group behavior and social interactions. I will collect data relevant to my theory findings in order to analyze if sports activities have an effect on student identity creation and social interactions. You can read more about this in my methodology part.

# Delimitation

In order to find out if various sports activities have affected students’ identity and social interactions in the past and present, in this project I have decided to work with the students who exercise. However, what I did not take into consideration was students who do not exercise. In my Thesis, I have left out these students; therefore, I cannot find out how their non-exercising experiences and activities have affected their lives. I understand that it would have been a useful factor that would have completed my investigation, because maybe, even though they do not exercise, they lead the same quality of life as student who exercise and maybe their activities affect them the same way. The reason for not comparing both sides is the lack of space in my Thesis, and the wish to focus thoroughly only on one side of the students – the ones who exercise. If my analysis will lead to positive results, there will be a chance for others to discover more about the students who do not exercise.

Even though I will write about identity and consumption, I have not found any theories that relate these concepts to sports consumption. Instead I will talk about how sports consumption affects students’ identities.

# Methodology

## 4.1 My general views on knowledge and scientific approaches

Before I start explaining my research methods, strategies and approaches, I will discuss the importance of ontology and epistemology, because these two are major ways of thinking in the research philosophy. The purpose of explaining my views in ontology and epistemology is to explicate my philosophical standpoint, so it is clear for you the way my mind process works in regards to this study.

Ontology is concerned about the nature of reality, and it raises questions of the norms we have about how the world works (Saunders et al, 2009, p.110). In my Thesis, I will hold the subjective view because this topic has a lot to do with individual’s thoughts, their storytelling and their emotions and viewpoints in regards to sports activities and their identity. This view also has to do with how are individuals using sports activities in order to develop their identity alone and in groups, reflecting their values, and eventually creating their personality. With this view, I will try to investigate the details and reasons behind students’ passion for sports and what is the reality working behind these reasons in regards to the usage of sports activities. I will do so in order to understand what meanings students attach to exercising, and why is exercising such a meaningful activity for them.

Epistemology, however, concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in the field of study and what my views and philosophy are (Saunders et al, 2009, p.112). Since research philosophy contains important assumptions about the way in which I view my Thesis, in order to answer the research questions and conduct the research I choose to accept both interpretivist and constructivist philosophies, because they are intertwined with only some aspects that differ. These aspects will be explained in the next paragraphs.

I agree with Crotty (1998) who in his book discusses the differences between these two philosophies, arguing that it would be useful to reserve the term constructivism only when there is a focus on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind (Crotty, 1998, p.58), which is vital to understanding of social identity (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.37), and use the term Interpretivism, when it is needed to understand and explain how are humans making sense of these meanings through their social reality (Crotty, 1998, p.66). Both interpretivist and constructivist philosophies support the subjective view by which I will discover student motives for exercising and what has influenced their decision to do so.

To help explain my two chosen philosophies, I will align them with my chosen target group - students who exercise and use them as an example. The constructivist philosophy in this case supports that every student perceive exercising differently as a consequence of their own views in regards to exercising; therefore these views can influence students’ own views on exercising, why do they do it, and what do they associate with exercising (Saunders et al. 2009, p.111). With the interpretivist philosophy, however, I wish to understand differences between humans as social actors (Saunders et al, 2009, p.115), and explore how students’ views about exercising influence the experiences students encounter through physical exercise, and how do they perceive exercising if they are in teams with others.

Together with the Interpretivist philosophy I have also adopted the empathetic stance with which I will try to understand the world from students’ point of view (Saunders et al, 2009, p.116). Since I am also a student and exercise from time to time, it will make it easier for me to “fit in their shoes”; therefore, with the empathetic stance I will reflect on students’ viewpoints with a non-judgmental and open mind.

In this study we will see how constructivist philosophy extends interpretivist philosophy by emphasizing the importance of exploring how different individuals – students, throughout different experiences, have built their beliefs and opinions about sports activities (Guba, Lincoln, 1989, p.44). With the interpretivist view, however, I will explore these beliefs and experiences with the goal to understand what meanings students attach to exercising in order to see whether it is likely that students’ identity and social interactions have developed through their exercising activities’ experiences.

Interpretivism and constructivism philosophies shape current social research and make an emphasis on the meaning making of the individual mind in relation to the experiences in the environment they live in (Crotty, 1998, p.248). By being an interpretivist and constructivist, I intend to understand the world of human experience – phenomenology, which will be explained in the next paragraph (Cohen, Manion, 1994, p.36). These philosophical positions also let me to rely upon the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2003, p.8), which is an important approach that needs to be taken into account to have a successful research in this particular area of study that includes individuals, their viewpoints and experiences.

Interpretivism comes from two intellectual traditions - phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. In my Thesis I will intertwine both of these traditions. I will use phenomenology tradition, because it is connected with how humans make sense of the world around them, i.e., what are students’ viewpoints on exercising, how these viewpoints influence the experiences they live through daily, and why these experiences are connected with their identity creation.

Symbolic Interactionism fits well with this study, because it refers to the interpretations social actors make from the actions of others with whom they interact, and how they adjust their own meanings and actions because of that (Saunders et al, 2009, p.116). Consequently, students who are a part of sports collective are a part of a group, which can influence their viewpoints and actions, which comes together with being a part of that group, which I will explain more thoroughly in the theory part.

The purpose of my research is to conduct an exploratory study by which I will seek new insights and assess the problem in a new light. Throughout my Thesis, I will do a search on literature, collect data and stories to answer my problem statement. In the exploratory study, the focus is initially broad and becomes progressively narrower as the research progresses, which is what happened in this study. At first, I had a wider topic and broad target group, but as the research progressed and I gained more data, the topic became narrower, because I had more information for my research (Saunders et al, 2009, p.140). Together with the exploratory study, my research approach will be deduction, because I plan to test my found theory with intention to either confirm it or reject it. Therefore, I will use structured methodology, like questionnaires to ensure the reliability (Saunders et al, 2009, p.125).

In this research, I will take on the role of the resources researcher instead of natural scientist. The reason for that is that resources researcher’s role is connected with feelings and attitudes, which seems more appropriate for my topic than the role of the natural scientist that is dedicated to collecting facts, data and other objective material (Saunders et al, 2009, p.112).

By using the subjective view and the above-mentioned philosophies, purpose and role, I will investigate students attitudes and solicit for their positive or negative viewpoints in regards to their experiences with sports activities, and how it has affected their identity and social interactions. At the same time, I will be a part of my study and dedicated to my respondents, because I consider that my interest, intuition and reflections are crucial to research process and investigation.

Moreover, I think that incorporation of students’ experiences in my research is crucial, because it will lead me to comprehend the general understanding of the proposed research goals. As a researcher, I recognize that all participants involved, including the researcher, bring their own unique interpretations of the world to the research. I consider that I as the researcher have to be open to the attitudes and values of the participants and suspend prior cultural assumptions[[3]](#footnote-3).

## 4.2 Methods

In this project, I will use both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to improve the validity and reliability of this study, about whom I will talk in the end of this sub-section. As mentioned before, I have chosen students as my main target group. With students, I mean, people who have enrolled in the higher education institutions, and are in the age between 18 and 27 years. I have chosen this target group because students are a very active audience and are always happy to participate in researches. Besides, during their studies, students establish their identity, which makes me curious to know how do they develop it and with what tools.

For my quantitative data, I have made a questionnaire of single choice answers that has gathered 112 respondents from different universities in Denmark. They are my friends, acquaintances and friends of friends. All of them have diverse backgrounds, i.e., they come from different countries (including Denmark), they have lived in different socioeconomic societies, and have had different experiences in relation to sports activities before and after they came to Denmark. Nevertheless, all of them are students currently living in Denmark, and doing sports activities at least once a week. Not all of the respondents are a part of sports collective, many of them exercise alone or just with a couple of friends.

My gathered quantitative data will show when did my respondents start doing sports activities, e.g., swimming, volleyball, dancing etc. Gym lessons do not count here, since those are a part of everyone’s lives, and cannot affect people as much as dedication to more serious sports activities outside the school. To continue, the quantitative data will show how often most of these students exercise, when did they start exercising, if their parents had anything to do with their exercising habits, if exercising has helped with their mood and social skills, if they are a part of any sports collective, and how has that affected their individual and group behavior. My collected data will show if students’ identity has changed ever since they became students, and whether or not they think they have different identities with every social group they interact, e.g., family, friends, work colleagues, sports collective etc.

We person have a keen desire to make sense of ourselves. One way to do this is to construct stories about our lives and the connections between what we have done and what has happened to us (Baker, 2014, p.1). Therefore, as to my qualitative data, I have chosen to collect stories from students, where they describe their relationships with sports activities, and how it has influenced their identity. Even though there is a great variety of epistemological and methodological approaches that can be used to look at the study of social identity, I believe that it is the stories of people that can respond to the question “Who am I?” (Abes, Jones, 2013, pp.3-6).

Story telling has also an ontological status, because the process of telling stories is an act of creating and constructing, and not simply an act of remembering or retelling. My goal here is to help my research participants to reflect on their old memories and write down their thoughts (Elliott et al, 2009, p.79). These self-narratives are autobiographies that we – perhaps without any intention on our part – use to give meaning to the events of our lives (Baker, 2014, p.1), and even though interviewing is a great research tool, I believe that with stories I can get closer to the students.

I think there is something more personal with these self-narratives, i.e., story’s author can just sit down and reflect on their life starting from childhood, and in that way open up regarding their experiences with sports activities and how it has influenced their lives. Some of these stories, students have written for me, are quite touching. Reading them, I feel like “getting into their skin”, and really understanding them. I believe that this qualitative data will serve me well in the analysis part, because person’s identity can be revealed through the stories they tell, and stories are the ones that can reveal how the individual constructs a sense of self (Abes, Jones, 2013, pp.3-6).

I have also used articles for my qualitative data collection. The authors of articles, e.g., Schouten, Elliott, Azmitia et al, have provided me with a broader perspective on my study and investigations of identity, and I have found new information about how sports activities are linked to identity and consumption. These articles provided me with insights to how individual identity is constructed, and how it is connected with consumerism, as a social ideology, and consumption, as an individual activity. With the help of these articles, I could see how sports consumption is also a part of identity construction, especially with my target audience, because sports consumption is one of the factors that influence identities and aspirations of young adults (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.230).

I consider that the reliability of my Thesis is in an almost high level, because the information I have gathered through the qualitative and quantitative data processes has confirmed answers to my questions repeatedly. Out of four types of reliability, in this Thesis I have used the interrater reliability, by which can be measured the recurrence to what extent two or more individuals agree.[[4]](#footnote-4) Interrater reliability refers to consistency in the research. The reasons for my almost high Thesis reliability is that, first I did quantitative analysis, and after I got the answers from the respondents, I did qualitative analysis by asking participants almost the same questions, by which I confirmed that answers were almost the same, and therefore, reliable.

To continue, I consider that the validity of my Thesis is in a medium level. With my data, I have referred to the most important concepts from my theory part; nevertheless, the statistical instruments I have used to measure my data might not be the most accurate, due to my poor knowledge in statistics. As to the external validity of the Thesis, I think that my collected data can be both transferable and generalizable, because the conclusions from my data can hold for other people and other places, and could be used yet again in other researches.

## 4.3 The structure of the theoretical knowledge

After discussing my methodological stance, I would also like to discuss the structure of my theoretical knowledge. I consider it necessary in order to clarify what my chosen theoretical topics are about and why I have chosen these exact topics in the theoretical part. In this sub-section I will also explain how my choice in these topics has helped me in the Thesis writing process.

My Thesis will subsequently consist of a collection of theories that I will use to analyze the empirical data. This will lead to an analytical discussion that is based on the problem formulation, ending in a conclusion.

The main theory that I have found relevant for this project is the Social identities theory. My reason for choosing this theory is that it is very suitable for my topic and includes all the necessary aspects for me to do my analysis with. Social identity refers to our way of thinking about ourselves and others based on social groups we are in; therefore, this theory seems relevant in order to research students social identities in the groups, and how they look at their sports activities and collectives they are in. Even though many authors argue that personal and social identity cannot be aligned together, I will use both identities, because only by combining them it can lead to an understanding about how identity empowers openness to both the individual and social developmental processes with students, their interactions, and in their relationship with consuming sports activities. The main identity theorist used in my project will be Henri Tajfel, who is one of the first ones to develop this theory.

The next theory I will investigate is about social group interactions. This will refer to students who are a part of sports collective; therefore, I will investigate how the processes of interaction are occurring in these groups. Here I will look at how individuals develop certain attitudes with members that are in the same group as they are and how they develop different attitudes and behaviors towards members that are in other groups, and if they even, do so. Here I will also use Henri Tajfel’s theory about the four concepts of social group interaction.

The next concept I will discuss in my theory part, is developed by Brewer and Gardner, and it regards the social self - the person’s sense of unique identity differentiated from others. The concepts of social self discuss and investigate whether or not the social self is interpreted as an individual or social. This concept will help me to define students and their social identities through the relationships they have with other persons or with other social groups.

Another theory I will use is the Student development theory as it focuses on emerging adulthood as a time for identity development. Therefore, this theory can be useful to show how identity develops within important student social groups, and how student attitudes change during their study years; hence, if sports activities develop this identity change. With this theory, I plan to explore student identity development processes, and the main theorist I will use here is Arthur W. Chickering.

Another concept I will discuss is regarding identity and consumption. In this theory part I will discuss how identity can be influenced by sports’ consumption. Consumption has become a means of masking difference across social classes through the display of individual identity. Individual identity can be shown in many ways, and one of them is through sports activities. That is why I have chosen to discuss this perspective more thoroughly, because my respondents are students who consume sports as well, and I want to know how consuming sports affect their identity.

# Theoretical knowledge

Since the topic of identity is so broad, I the beginning of this theory part, I will mainly focus on the general knowledge about identity and how identity is known and understood. Moreover, I will talk about two main concepts of identity – personal and social identity. I will describe both, and discuss the differences between them, as well as how can both identities be used together. Later on, with the help of different theorists, like Erikson, Tajfel, Chickering, I will discuss more thoroughly the concept of social identity, where I will include social interactions in groups, social self, and how all of these concepts can be linked to identity consumption through sports activities in the students’ lives.

## 5.1 Identity

Some decades ago, identity was an unproblematic concept, because one’s identity was fixed, solid and stable. One was a hunter or a member of a tribe, and the identity was more like an already defined social role where everyone knew their place in the society from the moment they were born (Elliott et al, 2009, p.76).

Over the past thirty years, there has been a very huge interest in the concept of identity. Now it has become a post-structural theory, and identity is no longer considered a fixed and stable construct, but as being dynamic, that can be produced and reproduced. The world we live in now, is full with competing images of who we can be and images of possible selves. Now, every human being can reproduce their identity/identities in relation to what kind of person they wish to represent. Identity is no longer considered as a thing; rather it is considered as a project and a process, which has to be worked out – monitored, organized and managed (Elliott et al, 2009, p.76). This is where we can link consumption to identity, because through consuming sports, students are also creating and managing their identity and creating their personalities.

Sociology seems to have a lot to say about identity. The central feature of the self in modern society is the constant questioning and reconstruction of the self and identity, making the identity development a lifetime project. We are constantly constructing and revising our personal stories and so reconstructing our identities and ourselves. Personal stories is something we carry with us every day. These stories include our experiences from childhood until now, our beliefs and values, our attitudes etc. As mentioned by Hannum (2007), with three different types of identities, our personal stories are bound to change over our lifetime, and our identities with them (Craib, 1998, p.2).

The three different types of person’s identity are: given identity, chosen identity and core identity. The given identity consists of the features or conditions that a person has no choice about, e.g., characteristics one was born with or given in childhood or later in their lives. For instance, a child was taught that exercising is good for their health. Chosen identity, on the other hand, consists of the characteristics one chooses, e.g., occupation, hobbies, political affiliation or place of residence. For example, later on in life, the child chooses for him/herself what profession he/she wants. The last but not least important one that makes us who we are is the core identity. It includes the attributes that a person thinks make them unique as an individual, e.g., traits, behaviors, beliefs, values and skills. Some of the attributes might change over the course of lifetime while others may remain the same. For instance, a person thinks he is the best in his team, because of his/her strength, or if a person has a strong belief that no one should cheat during the game (Hannum, 2007, p.12).

There are definitely many viewpoints on what people think identity is and how it should be understood. In order to comprehend the concept, one has to listen to what the other has to say, because identity stems from all the experiences a person has had during their lifetime, and from the social surroundings persons are a part of (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.43). No person’s identity will be the same; therefore, as many persons there are in the world, as many identities there will be, if not more. That is why every person can understand identity differently.

Erikson’s conceptualization of identity laid the groundwork for many theorists who followed in his footsteps; nevertheless, much has changed since he developed the first theory, and some of his viewpoints on identity might be outdated. I will discuss only some angles of Erikson’s work, but mostly I have chosen to explore more thoroughly other authors work, e.g., Tajfel, Chickering et al, and how have they evolved Erikson’s identity theory throughout the time until now (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.1).

### 5.1.1 Differences between personal and social identity

There exist two concepts of identity – personal identity and social identity. Many authors, e.g., Craib (2007) and Gergen (1991), argue that one cannot exist without the other, i.e., personal identity cannot exist without social identity and vice-e-versa. This argument I will discuss in the next theory part. To continue, the foundational theorists of psychological perspective on identity are Erikson, Lewin, Marcia et al, and later on there were many more, e.g., Josselson, Chickering and Reisser et al, who extended their work on personal identity. These authors’ theoretical priority was to research the individual and not society; hence, they emphasized on individual’s mental processes. With this psychological/personal identity perspective, these theorists came to a conclusion that the self is embedded in mental processes that arise from individual’s experiences of a single self or a singular identity. Therefore, here, the psychological theory of the personal identity discusses traits, characteristics and personality. Throughout the personal identity’s perspective, later was created the social identity theory (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.26).

The foundational theorists of sociological perspective on identity, however, are Mead, Stryker, Durkheim et al, and later on Tajfel, Levine et al. These followers took on the viewpoints that the self is developed out of social interactions. For example, Tajfel considered that society develops first, and that a person’s identity is rooted from socialized roles. This perspective shows that the self is placed in social structures, and stems from the social life with other people, while obtaining multiple selves and multiple identities due to this process. The sociological perspective endorses the importance of social roles in the identity construction (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.27). Namely, that society one lives in affects how each person’s identity will turn out.

Discussing Erikson’s definition of identity, Ruthellen Josselson (1987) offered this summary: *“Identity is the stable, consistent, and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. Identity integrates one’s meaning to oneself and others”* (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.30). Identity is a term widely used, and can mean many different things to many people (Deaux, 2001, p.1). Social identity, on the other hand, is mostly looked at from interpersonal relationships we have and can refer to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group membership (Deaux, 2001, p.1), whereas personal identity is looked at through individual personality traits people have (Hannum, 2007, p.8). To continue, I will discuss the major differences between both identities.

### 5.1.2 Discussion about differences between personal and social identity

There has been a continuous focus on research about the shift from personal identity to social identity (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.86); therefore, there are many views about whether or not personal and social identity can and should be viewed as one whole. For instance, Deaux’s (1993) view was that any distinction made between personal identity and social identity is somewhat arbitrary and misleading. The author suggested that social and personal identity are fundamentally interrelated in the sense that personal identity is defined by group memberships, and social groups are infused with personal meaning (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.36). Gergen (1991) on the other hand was among the first to discuss the dilemmas of identity in contemporary life. He advocated the view that identities are constructed primarily through relationships with others and with the society in which one lives in (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.38).

Craib (2007) describes that we all have a number of social identities, by whom we lead our relationships with other individuals and groups within our social lives. Craib continues by saying that social identities may come and go, but the personal identity goes on as something that unites all the social identities a person has ever had, have or will have. The author considers that the personal identity is not the same as social identity (Craib, 2007, p.4).

Social identity and personal identity has many components. It is in human’s nature to want to fit in, as well as, to be unique. Some parts of identity are visible, while others are not. Some aspects of identity are spoken about openly, while others are not. For instance, if a student wants to be a part of the basketball team, but cannot play because of a leg trauma, the identity is visible and spoken about openly. However, if a student plays in a basketball team, but is only doing that to please his dad, secretly hoping to become an artist; then the student’s identity is hidden and not spoken about openly. Aspects of a person’s identity can be gained, lost or changed over time. It is in different situations when we determine which parts of our identity are most important, helpful or harmful (Hannum, 2007, p.11).

In this project I will examine the psychosocial tradition. This psychosocial tradition and views reflect the characteristics of both psychological and sociological perspectives on identity (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.27). I will focus on both personal and social identity, because I believe that only by combining psychological and sociological approaches it can lead to an understanding of how identity enables responsiveness on both the individual and social level, in order to improve developmental processes with students, their interactions, and in their relationship with sports activities. Besides, the study of identity in higher education and student affairs also emerged from the psychosocial tradition (Evans, Forney et al, 2009, pp. 15-19); therefore, both identity perspectives can help me to understand, how students apply both, personal and social identity in the social environment. In addition, combining both perspectives will help to discover, how sports activities affect students’ identities and social interactions in these environments (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.27). That is why I will now explore the social identity perspective more profoundly.

## 5.2 Social identity

The term social identity is relatively new in the student development literature. Social identity theory has developed from other disciplines, particularly from social psychology, sociology, and cultural studies (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.35). In many cases, social identities include emotional and motivational aspects that often carry deep, emotional meanings. i.e., it can hide painful experiences from childhood, or secrets persons do not want anyone to know. These can be the reasons for person’s motivation to have or to obtain the social identities they want.

Social identity can serve as means of self-definition and self-esteem, and as means of interacting with people who share the same values and goals in life (Deaux, 2001, p.5). Individuals seek to define themselves and their social identities through the relationships they have with other persons or with other social groups (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.83). The first use of the term social identity goes back to social psychologist Henri Tajfel, who together with his scholar Turner, described social identity in regards to intergroup dynamics and insights of group membership. Social psychologists like Tajfel emphasize three levels of analysis in his identity studies – personality, interaction and social interaction (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.27). In the next parts, I will explore each of these three aspects in connection to social identity and social group environment.

### 5.2.1 Social identity in the group surroundings

Our attitudes and beliefs are often diverse, depending on what kind of groups we belong to. For instance, a basketball player will probably not have the same viewpoints as a member of a dance collective. Tajfel’s conceptualization of social identity is defined as a part of the individual’s self-concept (personal identity), which derives from being in a membership in a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group. Tajfel suggested that the term social identity can never fully address all the aspects of the identity development, but that the perceptions of self are influenced by membership in social groups (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.36). For example, a person’s confidence will most likely improve from knowing that his/her volleyball team is the best in the country. Social identity often refers to our way of thinking about ourselves and others, based on social groups around us, and the groups we are in, and it consists of person’s identity, which is the result of being a part of a particular group (Hannum, 2007, p.8)

Henri Tajfel and John Turner describe that we use the social identity to:

* Categorize people into groups based on a shared belief, experience or a characteristic
* Identify with certain groups ourselves
* Compare the groups we belong to with other groups, while thinking more highly of the group we are in (Hannum, 2007, p.8).

When we define ourselves by terms and features that we share with other people, that is called social identification. Although many people are members of many different groups, only some of them are meaningful for them in terms of how people define themselves (Deaux, 2001, p.1). For example, if a person is very communicative and has a group of work colleagues, group of close friends, group or running buddies, it might happen that the person feels the best only with one of those groups – the one whose members are more like him/her, and only one of those groups are actually important in the long-term perspective. To share a social identity does not necessarily mean that one interacts with all members of the group. However, it does mean that a person believes that they share characteristics with other group members that have significance for the individual member (Deaux, 2001, p.2).

A social identity is a way of grouping a number of people together based on some similar features. Some researchers talk about self-stereotyping, i.e., when people assume from society how they should be just because they are in one particular group. In addition, people often create their own self-definitions of what it means to be a particular type of person in a particular group, and sometimes stereotype others the same way (Deaux, 2001, pp.4-5). For example, if a male student is a part of a dance collective, he might assume that everyone believes that he is not manly enough for other sports activities, which might make him uncomfortable with the group he is in. This way the male student stereotypes himself.

The groups people identify with and feel like they belong to, are the groups they most likely feel more comfortable with. The sense of oneself belonging to a particular group begins quite early in life (Deaux, 2001, p.8). The behavior and characteristics typical of those groups are what feel normal to persons. That is why in many cultures belonging is part of identifying, and that is what draws a line between those who belong with you, and those who do not. Sometimes people tend to think of the group they belong to better than other groups, which is an aspect I will discuss later. The sense of belongingness to a group is why it is more likely that we assess people in our own group with more positive attitude, based on shared group interests, e.g., a basketball team who has a common goal to train hard in order to win a game (Hannum, 2007, p.12).

### 5.2.2 Social group interactions

This theory part is dedicated to investigate theories regarding individuals who are a part of a collective or group; hence, how are the processes of interaction occurring in these groups. When discussing social interactions, most of the theorists write about interactions in groups - how individuals develop certain attitudes with members that are in the same group as they are (in-group); and, how they develop different attitudes and behaviors towards members that are in other groups (out-group). There have been some secluded studies about the evolution of in-groups and out-groups; however, these studies did not expand into a theoretical advance in the field (Tajfel, 1974, p.66).

In the study about in-groups and out-groups, researchers (Tajfel did not mention their names) focused on intergroup processes taking into an account attitudes and behavior towards out-groups. The researchers concluded that in order for the members of an in-group to be able to hate or dislike an out-group, or to discriminate against it, they must first have acquired a sense of belonging to a group, which is clearly distinct from the one they hate, dislike or discriminate against (Tajfel, 1974, p.66). To continue, even though one might be unsatisfied with his/her group, one must understand that no group lives alone – all groups in society live in the midst of other groups (Tajfel, 1974, pp.69-70).

One of the most important and resilient problems that is posed to an individual by his insertion into society is to find, create and define his place in these social group networks; hence, in-group. It is reasonable to assume that both in-group and out-group attitudes and behavior must be determined by self-defining oneself, i.e., by discovering in what way person’s attitudes and behavior goes together with the chosen in-group, and why these features wouldn’t go well with an out-group (Tajfel, 1974, p.67).

If an individual have problems with self-definition in a social context or in the group, the person can be endorsed to look at one’s perception of social identity. In our kinds of societies, an individual strives to achieve a satisfactory concept or image of himself. This was one of the bases of Festinger’s (1954) theory of social comparison. Festinger was concerned with social comparisons, where individuals make comparisons between each other and how these assessments of one other leads to inter-individual comparisons (Tajfel, 1974, p.68). However, Festinger neglected an important contributing aspect of an individual’s self-definition, namely, that the person is simultaneously a member of numerous social groups, and that this membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that a person has of him/herself (Tajfel, 1974, p.69).

### 5.2.3 Tajfel’s four concepts

Tajfel mentions four concepts that he links in his discussion about social group interaction: social categorization, social identity, social comparison and psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1974, p.69). When discussing the first concept – social categorization, an individual tries to systematize and simplify his/her environment by categorizing him/herself into different groups. This presents theoretical differences between the role played in one particular social group, and the role in person’s social environment in general. In other words, social categorization or social grouping is a process of bringing together people that are equivalent with regard to an individual’s actions, intentions, attitudes and systems of beliefs (Tajfel, 1974, p.69). For instance, if a person enjoys running, he/she will more likely join a group who likes running as well, because of the same attitudes and beliefs they have about running. It is more likely that the person will feel good with other members and will have an easy time to interact with them, because other runners might also think that running is the best way to stay healthy and fit.

The second concept was discussed already earlier; it is the social identity, and in this context social identity can be understood as a part of an individual’s self-concept that derives from individual’s knowledge of being in a membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1974, p.69). For example, the individual partakes the attitudes and beliefs of the group, because he/she wants to be a part of the group, and he/she is willing to accept these attitudes in order to belong in the group.

Social categorization can, therefore be considered as a system that creates and defines the individual’s own place in society. As Berger (1966) has written: *“Every society contains a repertoire of identities, where society not only defines but also creates a psychological reality. The individual recognizes himself in the society, i.e., he recognizes his identity as he lives in his chosen society”* (Tajfel, 1974, p.69). This is when the individual recognizes him/herself as being a part of the group, and understands that this is the place for him/her to be.

It is social comparison concept that links social categorizing with social identity. Namely, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing with the opinions and abilities of others. This means that persons from one group will consciously or unconsciously, compare the features of their group to the features of the other groups. However, Festinger (1954) in his theory was mainly concerned with the testing of opinions regarding characteristics of individuals, and with the similarity in opinions and abilities among persons who associate with one another (Tajfel, 1974, p.70).

The psychological aspects and consequences of being a member in a group are vulnerable, because of the individual's attachment to a multigroup structure. Consequently, the social identity of an individual in the eyes of others is often perceived from individual’s belonging to a certain social group, because it is automatically perceived that the group brings some emotional significance, hence characteristics to him/her (Tajfel, 1974, p.72).

A social group will be capable of preserving its social identity and those aspects that are valued the most, and keep the positively valued distinctiveness from other groups. However, sometimes an individual may wish for his own group to be more similar to certain other groups; this is usually so when these other groups are considered as superior or better in some respects, or when the individual does not feel like a part of his current group. (Tajfel, 1974, p.72).

Nevertheless, the fact that an individual may wish for his group to be more like another, in certain respects means that his own group is not adequately fulfilling its function of contributing to positively valued social identity. Therefore, it is true what Festinger stated – we come closer and associate with those who are similar to us, and compare our own group with others (Tajfel, 1974, p.72). The reason for this evaluative intergroup differentiation can be found in the need of the individual to provide order, meaning to the situation; and that need is fulfilled through the creation of intergroup differences (Tajfel, 1974, p.75).

In each individual’s life, there will be a situation where he/she acts exclusively as an individual rather than a member of a group. As well as, there will be other times where he/she acts exclusively in terms of his group membership (Tajfel, 1974, p.78). The behavior of each individual can be seen as variable, where one extreme consists of acting fully in terms of self and the other of acting fully in terms of his/her group. Any action undertaken in terms of group membership will always include some aspects specific to the individual’s own background, aims and motives, which cannot be fully identified with the interests of the group in terms of which he is acting (Tajfel, 1974, p.87). Nevertheless, acting in terms of group rather in terms of self cannot be expected to play an important role in an individual’s behavior. That can happen only if there is a clear structure of “us” and “them” in the group, which cannot be so easily controlled based on social and psychological conditions (Tajfel, 1974, p.89).

### 5.2.4 Multiple social groups

In their study, authors Brewer and Roccas (2002) discuss how researchers of group processes have expressed increasing interest in the fact that most individuals are simultaneously members of multiple social groups. There is definitely a possibility of having multiple identities; hence, spreading and integrating these multiple identities into different groups (Deaux, 2001, p.4). Most researchers who study social identification agree that people have multiple group identities; however there has been a relatively little research on the nature of relationships, or on the effects of holding multiple social identities or intergroup attitudes in general (Brewer, Roccas, 2002, p.88).

Individuals belong to multiple social groups and to groups of different types. A recent analysis in the article by Lickel et al. (2000) identified four general types of groups – intimacy groups, task groups, social categories and loose associations. Among these, intimacy groups and small task groups are characterized to have in common interpersonal connections and face-to-face interactions among its group members. Therefore, these are likely to be groups that are based on common bonds or personal ties among all of the group members. Large task groups and social categories are more likely to be based on symbolic attachment to the group rather on the personal ties that exist among specific group members. Shared membership in such large, symbolic groups engages collective identities that are depersonalized and do not share so freely with one another (Brewer, Roccas, 2002, p.89).

Individuals differ in how they perceive the patterns of the groups of which they are simultaneously members of as similar to each other, and featuring the same characteristics. The individual sees his or her in-groups as highly similar to each other, and as sharing the same attributes and values. The more a person perceives the groups, to which he or she belongs as being similar to each other, the less complex is his or her social identity (Brewer, Roccas, 2002, p.94). As mentioned before, most of the time individuals are surrounded by others who are similar to themselves. The less complex is the social environment within which people socialize in, the less complex will be society as a whole (Brewer, Roccas, 2002, p.96).

## 5.3 Interpersonal and collective identities

Interpersonal and collective identities are social extensions of the self, but differ in whether the social connections are personalized or not, and whether a person is identifying with a certain social group. Interpersonal identities are those that derive from intimate relationship, e.g., parents, friendship, and can derive from being in small face-to-face groups. Collective social identities, however, does not require personal relationships among group members (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.83).

The distinction between interpersonal and collective identities is a matter of inclusiveness, i.e., how much of the self is one willing to give to interpersonal relationship or the collective one is in. There are several facets of identities people show to the world – private, public and collective. The public self represents how people are amongst their closest friends and family, and how they portray themselves in the relationship with these significant others. The collective self reflects the characteristics a person has and that are shown to a group a person belongs to, e.g., volleyball team, kayak club etc. (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.84).

### 5.3.1 Social self

Until recently, social psychological theories of the self, have focused on the individuated self-concept – the person’s sense of unique identity differentiated from others. Cross-cultural perspectives have brought a renewed interest in the social self aspects, and to how individuals define themselves in terms of their relationship to others and to social groups. Cross-cultural perspectives follow the idea that connectedness and belonging are not merely affiliations or alliances between self and others but entail fundamental differences in the way the self is interpreted (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.83).

Some of the theories regarding the social self focuses on cross-cultural differences, whether the self is interpreted as an individual or social; however, these self-interpretations might coexist within the same individual, and can be activated at different times or in different contexts (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.83).

All the previously mentioned theories bring out a distinction between personal self (aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the self from all others), and social self (aspects of the self-concept that reflect assimilation to others or significant social groups). These different theories show distinctions of social selves; they derive from social relationships and independence with other people and from belonging to other social groups with bigger collective (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.83).

### 5.3.2 Social extensions of the self

In the Table Nr.1 you can see the different aspects of the self, referred to different levels of inclusiveness of the self – individual, interpersonal (social) and group (collective). The self-concept, hence person’s identities shift depending on what the situations is, or amongst which people or groups a person is surrounded with (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.84).

**Table Nr.1. Social extensions of the self**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level of analysis** | **Self-concept** | **Basis of self-evaluation** | **Frame of reference** | **Basic social motivation** |
| Individual | Personal | Traits | Interpersonal comparison | Self interest |
| Interpersonal | Relational | Roles | Reflection | Other’s benefit |
| Group | Collective | Group prototype | Intergroup comparison | Collective welfare |

Many theories of the personal self, assume that the global (overall) self at the individual level derives from personal traits and characteristics that are based on interpersonal (social) comparisons to relevant others. The relational self, however, is defined in terms of relationships with others, and from an appropriate role behavior (in Table Nr.1 it is referred to as reflection in the sense that the self is derived from the response of the other persons in the relationship). Finally, the collective self-concept is determined by the representation of the in-group, where self-worth derives from the status the in-group has given to the person (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.85).

Another important transformation that is associated with different levels of self-construction is a change in the basic goals of social interaction. There is an essential difference between social motives that derive from personal self-interest and those derived from concern for the interests of others, so when the concept of self changes, the goals, interests and motivations of the self changes together with it, e.g., when one becomes a student, the goals and motivations might change. Therefore, interdependent relationships are driven on mutual concern for the interests of the other, where identification with in-groups can elicit cooperative behavior where individuals develop a cooperative orientation toward shared problems (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.86).

In the research literature on interpersonal attraction, liking between two individuals is strongly related to the similarity between them. People are likely to become friends if they sense that they are similar to each other in their preferences, attitudes and values. For example, in-group members tend to like each other more than a person from an out-group does, even if they do not know anything about their personal characteristics. This attraction happens just because they are in the same group (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.86).

As Hogg’s research discovered (1992, 1993), liking is sometimes based on group membership alone, but still, there is a distinction between personal attraction and social attraction. Personal attraction is based on personal identities of the individuals involved and similarity of interests, values etc. Social attraction, on the other hand, is based on preferential liking of in-group over out-group members, i.e., a particular group’s characteristics are more attractive to the individual than those of the out-group’s attributes (Brewer, Gardner, 1996, p.86).

## 5.4 Student Development

Student development theory emerged in the early 1960s in response to dramatic changes in higher education. That is when researchers began to focus their study specifically on university student development, their experience in universities, and the campus environment (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.20), because emerging adulthood is a time for identity development and progression (Azmitia et al, 2013, p.757). It was Erikson’s (1968) theory of identity development that was used in order to highlight how identity develops within important social relationships within student groups (Azmitia et al, 2013, p.746).

There are many definitions of student development. The development itself is considered as a positive growth process in which the individual becomes increasingly able to integrate and act on many different experiences and influences. I will use the definition of student development developed by Rogers (1990) who reflects on it as ways that a student grows progresses or increases his or her developmental capabilities because of enrollment in an institution of higher education (Evans, Forney et al, 2009, pp. 15-19).

### 5.4.1 Students’ identity change

Student’s growth and development includes changing skills, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings. Every student is different with their own specific set of developmental attributes and identities (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.21). The change in many student characteristics includes also the change in students’ identity, because, as discussed before, we never stop developing our identity. Developing a healthy identity is a key task of adolescence and especially emerging adulthood. The university students must adapt to their new academic and social environments, while renegotiating their relationships with their families and friends from home. Shifting to a new environment requires a renegotiation of one’s identity while developing new support networks that supplement the existing ones (Azmitia et al, 2013, p.744). Therefore, a key aspect of emerging adults’ successful transition to university is developing a clear sense of identity within the context of close relationships. Later, in my analysis part, I will try to prove that this transition to develop identity can be made easier with sports activities (Azmitia et al, 2013, p.745).

Identity development is not an individual project and the identity exploration process can be stressful for some individuals (Azmitia et al, 2013, p.746). Transitions to new contexts of life stages can be destabilizing experiences for students’ identities, prompting them to re-examine and potentially reconfigure their identities. As students move through university, emerging adults can revisit, refine, or change identities they developed during adolescence as well as craft new identities that correspond better to their college academic and social niches (Azmitia et al, 2013, p.746).

We each have our own identity story, which is a story we tell to the people we meet. Unconsciously or consciously, we show what our character is and establish our viewpoints through the conversations we have with different people. People’s identity stories change depending on the time and space in which we tell them, i.e., the story you would tell the course mates you just met, would be different from the story you would tell to your new work-colleagues. The same is with university students; they bring multiple identity stories with them to campus every day. Some of these stories are visible, and some are not, both to others and to ourselves, i.e., we do not immediately reveal all our viewpoints or the truth about ourselves; there are some features about us that we keep only to ourselves, or that we tell only to a specific group of people, e.g. family (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.17). Nevertheless, changes in context, new experiences, fresh perspectives and evolving worldviews contribute to a person’s multiple stories, and it is the students themselves who decide which stories should be known to whom (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.17).

Author Adichie (2009) commented the power of stories: *“The power is the ability not just to tell a story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person”* (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.18). By exposing their story, one exposes their identity to other university students, and one can only hope for students to be able to create and tell their own identity stories more often (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.18).

Just as identity stories change, so too, must the theories that help make sense of them (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.18). The study of identity has been integral to university student development theory and practice, centering on the seemingly simple question of *“Who I am?”* Understanding of identity is necessary in order to understand university students and their experiences in higher education contexts (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.19). Students must resolve specific developmental tasks for growth to occur, which is described as “crisis” or decision-making point. Widick (1978) and his colleagues defined crisis as not a time of panic or disruption, but as a decision point – that moment when one reaches an intersection and must turn one way or the other. (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.28-29).

### 5.4.2 Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Development

Chickering (1993) with his partner Reisser contributed a great deal of foundational knowledge base on college student identity through his theory of the Seven Vectors of Development. In his concept development is represented by vectors, or areas of concern, which “describe major highways for journeying towards individuation – the discovery and refinement of one’s unique way of being – and also toward communication with other individuals and groups. See Table Nr.2. Since the stabilization of identity was the primary task for adolescents and young adults, Erikson’s work was a starting point for Chickering’s attempt to synthesize data about college student development into a general framework that could be used to guide educational practices (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.31-33).

**Table Nr.2 Seven vectors of development**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Chickering and Reisser’s seven vectors of development** | |
| Vector One | Developing competence (intellectual, physical, manual and interpersonal |
| Vector Two | Managing emotions |
| Vector Three | Moving through autonomy toward interdependence |
| Vector Four | Developing mature interpersonal relationships |
| Vector Five | Establishing identity |
| Vector Six | Developing purpose |
| Vector Seven | Developing integrity |

Chickering’s theory of vectors is not only about identity development, but also about developing a sense of self. All the developmental vectors could be classified under the general heading “identity formation” because all the vectors lead the individual toward a sense of self. The fifth vector, establishing identity, is more specific regarding student development, and is related to comfort with one’s appearance; comfort with self, e.g. social and cultural context; clarity of self-concept and self- acceptance; and integration of internal and external perceptions of self (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.34). See Table Nr.2.

Chickering and Reisser recognized that students would be in different places developmentally and that will influence their movement along the vectors; they will experience the university environment differently; therefore, the developmental task or vector that would be difficult for one student, will be easily managed by another. Both theorists report that undertaking the fifth vector, establishing identity, it requires having resolved the previously arranged vectors (developing competence, managing emotions, independence and mature interpersonal relationships) (Abes, Jones, 2013, p.34).

## 5.5 Identity and consumption

In this theory part, I will discuss how identity can be influenced by sports’ consumption. When I talk about relationship between identity and sports’ consumption, I talk about Hannum’s chosen identity (See Page nr.16), where he discussed that we all have given identities, which can been given in childhood, the ones we choose, e.g., hobbies, place of residence, and the core identity, e.g., beliefs, attitudes. For instance, by choosing if we want to run outside or go to a swimming pool three times a week, we choose what kind of sports we wish to consumer; hence, what kind of identity we want to apply on ourselves, i.e., to be a dancer or a boxer. That is why in this case, when I talk about identity and sports consumption, I talk about how students choose their identity. Only sometimes this identity is given. It is when children are taken to a sports activities’ class by their parents; nevertheless, later children have made the decision to continue with the sports activity.

Unfortunately, I could not find a theory relevant to identity and sports consumption topic, but I will describe though the relationship between identity and consumption, which I think is also relevant, and give comparisons in regards to sports activities.

### 5.5.1 Post-modernity and high-modernity

There have been occurring major transformations in the structure of current societies and modernity, which have created changes in the production and consumption areas, culture and knowledge, and communication. All of these changes are increasingly globalizing and being dependent from one another. This has an impact on the relationship between individuals and the social structures in which they live out their everyday lives: the state, the civil society, markets and other societies (Cooper, May, 1995, p.75).

Post-modern identity is established through role-playing and image construction. While the focus of modern identity used to revolve around one’s occupation, one’s function in the public sphere (or family), post-modern identity revolves around leisure, is centered on looks, images, and consumption. Modern identity was a serious affair that defined who one was (profession, family, political identification etc.), while post-modern identity is a function of leisure and is grounded on improvisation (Cooper, May, 1995, p.79). That is why I consider sports activities to be also a part of that. Since post-modern identity revolves around looks and images, it cannot not revolve around sports activities. Not only exercising is part of leisure, it is also a part of how people want to be presented in the society.

Now we live in the age of high modernity, which is a set of environmental conditions, where individuals confront diversity in their everyday encounters, and increased set of life-style choices, i.e. in this case, a person can go dancing, swimming, do karate or judo. Basically, a person can decide to do any sports activity they wish in order to develop themselves and their image, and in the limits of what they can do and can afford. Increased set of life-style choices has activated urges for personal growth and independence. In a consequence, individuals are now actively involved in building and rebuilding a sense of clear identity and authenticity for themselves (Cooper, May, 1995, p.77). In the age of high modernity, individuals face dilemmas in constructing their identities; mostly, because they have a possibility of choosing from a wide prospect of behavioral options (Cooper, May, 1995, p.77).

### 5.5.2 Relationship between identity and consumption

The relationship between identity and consumption has been a topic of much debate across the social sciences. Within marketing and consumer research a view has emerged that suggests it is through consumption that people are empowered to make up their identity or who they want to be (Elliott et al, 2009, p.75). In consequence, the same can happen also through sports consumption. One characteristic that makes persons unique is our ability to examine ourselves, and improve ourselves repeatedly in order to attempt a self-betterment. The sense of improving drives us to create ourselves time after time, and we consume goods and services in order to help our identity development (Schouten, 1991, p. 412).

In their research, authors Elliott et al, have made the concept of identity their focus, and have used consumption merely as a context through which to study its development. Elliott et al have illustrated the tensions that exist between people’s ability to make up their identities through the choices that they make, and the constraints on their ability to do so. In this theory part I will investigate how people’s identity development change over time due to their relationship with consumption (Elliott et al, 2009, p.76).

According to Elliott et al, people avoid a potential identity crisis by actively constructing, maintaining and communicating their identity, and they do so partly by using the symbolic meaning of brands, leisure and lifestyle pursuits. Therefore, consumer culture has become an arena for the businesses to compete with their products and services. Companies are trying to win over consumers, so they can apply on them the identity they have envisioned for them, e.g., Nike begins selling new pair of sneakers and with their advertisements, they are trying to convince customers that with these shoes they will be able to run faster than others to different places to do many irons. Eventually, a person who has a busy lifestyle that reflects on this advertisement might get influenced by this ad, buy the shoes, and apply this new identity whenever they have to hurry up from place to place. These running shoes would identify this person as being busy and active. In addition, this is how business people use consumption as means through which they can incorporate the potential identity positions, and again reproduce them, turning this into an ongoing identity project. (Elliott et al, 2009, p.77).

This symbolic, communicative interpretation of identity through consumption is appealing to many. Elliott et al focus on understanding the relationship between identity and consumption as a process through which identities are selected, endorsed and reinforced, making it a social development process (Elliott et al, 2009, p.77).

Reproduction of an existing identity and its incorporation into ongoing identity projects is a social act. Very often people wish to gain recognition from others in order to adopt a valid and recognized identity. Selecting a particular identity through products, e.g. designer sportswear, or services, e.g., expensive fitness club, can be a challenge, because even though a person feels good with one identity, he/she will not act on it until the chosen identity is approved and even encouraged by society or social groups a person belongs to (Elliott et al, 2009, p.78).

In today’s postmodern society, the self is conceptualized as a social construction. Individuals due to interaction with the social world around them create identity through consumption. Consumer culture, and its dual activities of consumption and advertising, become tools for individual identity building, as well as social identification. We place ourselves within social groups, our social groups within society, and evaluate others’ social positioning, and thereby identities through consumption in response to marketing (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.230). Stearns (2006) describes a consumerist society as one in which many people formulate their goals in life partly through acquiring goods that they clearly do not need for subsistence of traditional display. They become entangled in the process of acquisition, e.g., shopping – and take some of their identity from a demonstration of the new item they buy and exhibit (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.230).

Consumer culture and choices of identity can be represented as a big buffet of variety of meals. People are offered a variety of symbolic resources (products, services) that people get to interact with, and in that way (re)produce their identities. The same goes for consuming sports activities. With different activities, people can get to show different identities whenever they want to, e.g., with dancing a woman can show that she’s elegant and sophisticated; with boxing a man can show that he knows how to protect himself and others. Consequently, there is a variety of attributes connected to each sports activity, and for each person the attributes they want to show are different. The search for identity almost seems like an endless choice that can turn chaotic, be paralyzing and potentially disempowering (Elliott et al, 2009, p.79).

Self-doubts and anxiety with regard to sexuality and romance also drive people’s desire for self-transformation of identity through consumption. Such feelings may arise from body images that fail to measure up to the ideals created by popular culture, which prescribes the size, shape, weight, color, and texture of the sexually attractive body and relentlessly promotes the means by which those attributes may be obtained (Schouten, 1991, p.423). The necessity to measure up to an ideal can also drive person to different sports activities, in order to improve one’s look or identity.

Other people are motivated by the need for greater control over their lives. Plastic surgery and other goods and services, such as clothing, cosmetics, exercise equipment, and weight loss programs provide some direct control over the physical appearance and, through it, may provide greater power of confidence in social, occupational, or intimate relationships (Schouten, 1991, p.423).Although people see the choice in who they may want to be, and how to achieve it, e.g., slim, muscular or healthy, many recognize that not all identities are equally available to all, regardless of how desired they may be. For instance, some people cannot get slim, no matter how hard they try, because they lack decisiveness. Moreover, because identities are socially meaningful categories, some identities, will be difficult to negotiate or will be non-negotiable. That is why people are constantly negotiating and competing for identities, because no one can have the same ones (Elliott et al, 2009, p.88).

Identity is a naturally social construct that is realized through social interaction and endorsement from others (Elliott et al, 2009, p.90), and it is highly influenced by self-concept, which is a complex and highly sensitive topic for many individuals in their daily social lives (Schouten, 1991, p.413). People spend much of their lives with self-concepts that are relatively stable, reflecting established social roles, and giving attention to building and maintaining a particular life style and identities that society would expect them to reflect (Schouten, 1991, p.421).

### 5.5.3 Young adults and consumption

Emerging adulthood has been identified and characterized by high levels of exploration by many opportunities, and by high levels of uncertainty and instability (Ragozini et al, 2014, p.3). Today’s young adults live in a world of media bombardment. They receive increasing attention from advertisers who wish to tap into youth’s contemporary purchase power and their potential as adult consumers (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.229). Young adults construct their adolescent selves and form their future aspirations, and they do so within a culture in which consumption is used to define social identities through the marking and masking of differences, the identification of self and others (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.230). Therefore, belonging to a certain sports activities group can also help to define one’s social identity, because it can help young adults to identify with other people much easier.

This relationship between consumption and identity may be particularly obvious among young adults. During student years, young people are both individuating themselves from their parents and identifying themselves within social peer groups in a new environment - university. This involvement in the task of identity building leads to concern with marking one’s identity for others (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.230). When these groups are attained, the members of it are marked by specific consumer choices that identify them not only as individuals but also as members of social networks (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.231).

Young adults are not unique in their use of consumption to mark social groups and locate themselves within social hierarchies. They are merely imitating the social norms of adult culture. This increases the importance of material goods, which is encouraging for young adults; besides, they are a valuable marketing demographic for whom companies compete to gain their purchase power (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.231).

Within consumer culture, young adult’s expectations for their future selves are likely to involve desired patterns of consumption associated with their aspirations. These aspirations are linked to youth’s current and desired social class positioning and associated economic and personal power they wish to gain in the future (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.232). Marketers have long been aware of the link between money and power, and consumption marks independence and defines the self (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.232). Since most of the young adults do not possess big amounts of money to gain power over others, the only way they can gain power is by demonstrating their image through their purchases and activities.

Consumerism can build up the illusion of equality; technically, everyone can buy what is being advertised. Yet not everyone has the same purchase capacity to do so. The assumed equality of opportunity, promoted through the marketing system, masks and underlying inequality structured by differential access to choice. Marketed lifestyles signify social standings and become class-specific given that their market availability masks individuals’ unequal purchase capacities (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.233). Through difference marking, consumption becomes a powerful tool for making identities. This may be particularly true for young adults whose imagined future selves reflect a desire to cross a certain social class into a better one (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.233).

McAlexander and Schouten (1989) found changes of appearance to be symbolically important in coping with certain role transitions (Schouten, 1991, p.413). Women/girls, and increasingly Men/boys, are expected to consume their way into attractiveness. Flipping through the average women’s magazine, a reader finds that many pages are comprised of advertisements for products aimed at “improving” women, that is, making them more attractive and ,thereby, more “successful” heterosexualized creatures (Deutsch, Theodorou, 2010, p.234).

People are like marketing characters; they appear to manage their lives as commodities and perform in a way that increases their own socioeconomic value in the eyes of others and themselves. For many people the physical attractiveness is very important in order to fit into certain social role performances, or to fit the market value of themselves, and to show their value through their looks and consumption of goods and services (Schouten, 1991, p.413).

# Analysis

In this analysis part, I will use my qualitative and quantitative findings –self-narratives and survey responses, and base these findings on my theoretical knowledge, in order to answer my problem statement, and to discover how sports activities have influenced and if they continue influencing students’ identity and social interactions. With my questions (See Appendix Nr.1) and self-narratives (See Appendixes Nr.2-10), I plan to find out if exercising has helped and continue on helping students with their social skills, and if it has improved communication with other people and groups they are a part of.

## 6.1 Age and frequency of exercising

I will start my analysis with the Chart Nr.1, which concerns the age in which my respondents started to exercise as part of their afterschool activities. In my survey, I specifically stated that gym lessons in school do not count as an answer. I have notified that because gym lessons is something that more or less every child in the school was obligated to do for many years; therefore the effect on identity cannot be measured in the same way, i.e., a teenager who exercises only in school, and a teenager who goes to school’s gym lessons and is a part of a football team outside the school. In the end, the identities of these two teenagers would be different; however, this is only an assumption. I cannot really prove it, because I did not collect answers from students who have never done sports activities outside the school, and therefore, I cannot know if these students’ identities have developed the same way or not.

To continue, what counts here, is the age of my respondents and when have they started to do sports activities outside the school, e.g., volleyball team, football team, dancing lessons, swimming etc. With the Chart Nr. 1, I want to show that the students I have selected have started exercising from early age, teenager age, and some of them from age when they started their studies. Consequently, throughout this analysis, I will try to prove that it has also had an effect on their identities as students.

**Chart Nr.1 Respondents’ age when starting their sports activities**

**From what age did you start exercising frequently?**

Age 5-7

:

**8 %**

Age 8-10

:

**11 %**

Age 11-13

:

**7 %**

Age 14-16

**12 %**

:

Age 17-19

:

**24 %**

Age 20-22

:

**26 %**

Age 23-25

:

**12 %**

As Chart Nr.1 shows, many of my respondents have had relationships with sports since they were little; some of them started exercising only in the study years. As for the qualitative data respondents, most of them started exercising since they were very young. Nick, for example writes: *“I started swimming when I was seven years old.”* See Appendix Nr.6, and Liva writes: *“I have been dancing in a folk dance collective since I was 4-5 years old.”* See Appendix Nr.5. Moreover, Anders writes: *“I have been “swimming”, back to the point of me being carried around the pool, so 3 years old would be my guess. I was swimming from then until I was 11-12 years old.”* See Appendix Nr.2. Correspondingly, other story writing participants also started exercising when they were less than ten years old. There are only two participants who did not start exercising in the young age; however, they have been around sports activities, because their parents played sports.

To continue, Chart Nr.2 shows that all of my respondents are exercising minimum once a week. Also my qualitative data participants are exercising frequently, e.g., Thomas: *“I am exercising 5-7 times a week”*, Anita: *“.. in winter I exercise 2-4 times a week, and in other seasons 1-2 times a week”*, Janis: *“I am trying to exercise at least 2-4 times a week at least for one hour.”* Liva: *I used to dance 3-4 times a week .. now it’s only twice a week“,* and Nick: *“In earlier years I had practices at least 6 times a week, but now it’s down to twice a week.”* See Appendix Nr. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8. For now, this can only show that these persons are dedicated to exercising, and it can say only a bit about their character. We can see that 35% of the respondents are exercising at least once a week, and 32% exercise twice a week. However, 16% and 17% of the respondents are exercising three times and more every week, which shows consistency and decisiveness in their character, and that they are goal-oriented, i.e., no matter what happens that week, they will exercise, and that is undeniably a part of their identity. Nevertheless, I will discuss the characteristics exercising has given them later in the analysis.

**Chart Nr.2 Frequency of exercising**

Once

:

**35 %**

Twice

:

**32 %**

Three **times**

:

**17 %**

More than three

:

**16 %**

**How many times a week do you exercise?**

## 6.2 Parents as an example

Another important aspect that I decided to research further is, if there is a pattern between student’s devotion to exercising, and that of their parents. That is why I inquired if student’s parents or one of the parents are exercising with frequency. The results of Chart Nr. 3 show that a major part of my respondents have grown up in an environment where both parents or just one of them, exercise, which makes it a total of 63%. Nevertheless, there is still 37% of respondents whose parents do not exercise. In order to investigate further if students have been encouraged to exercise by their parents, we should look upon the next chart.

**Chart Nr.3 Parents’ devotion to sports activities**

**Are your parents devoted to sports activities?**

Yes

:

**22 %**

No

:

**37 %**

Only one of them

:

**41 %**

Chart Nr.3 has served the purpose of showing that many of my respondents parents exercise, which can help me to explore if parents devotion to exercising has influenced students’ decision to exercise themselves, and if they have taken their parents as examples. As discussed in the theory part, there are three types of identity – given identity, chosen identity and core identity. In this case, I would like to discuss given identity (See Page Nr.16). It consists of features or conditions that a person has no choice about, e.g., characteristics one was born with or given in childhood or later in their lives.

As we know, parents are a huge example in our lives; even if we do not see it or do not want to admit it. Hence, parents’ lifestyle choices and personalities also affect us, especially in the childhood. They are the examples of how one should live, what is correct and not; therefore, parents’ devotion to sports is big factor for the child to start exercising as well. In Chart Nr.4, we can see that 34% of respondents admitted that the fact that their parents exercise, has encouraged them to do the same. This means that almost half of the students who have at least one parent who exercise feel encouraged to do the same.

C**hart Nr.4 Parent’s as an example**

**Do you think that your parent's devotion to exercising has encouraged you to do the same?**

Yes

:

**34 %**

No

:

**47 %**

Maybe

:

**19 %**

Some of the qualitative data participants reflected on that in their self-narratives. As Lene admitted it: *“I have been around sport's activities ever since I was little. My dad used to play professional badminton, .. and later, my dad started to take me to swimming pool twice a week. .. My dad ran every other day and kept on encouraging me to do the same.”* See Appendix Nr.7. Now, Lene is exercising at least twice a week in the fitness club. In her self-narrative, she mentions her dad a lot, as being the person who has encouraged her a lot, and who has showed her the positive aspects of exercising

Anita also refers positively to her dad: *“My dad has played basketball since he was a teenager, and he is still playing, even though he is 65 years old now, so it has definitely showed me and taught me the values my parents have and the benefits that can come from working out.”* See Appendix Nr.3. As said before, very often, children mirror their parents, and sometimes even overtake their habits and values, which is a considerable factor that confirms that students are encouraged by their parents.

Anders’ parents, however, have showed him a different example on sports activities. He writes: *“My family has never really been into sports, but both my mom and dad have been doing outdoor activities like hiking, camping, cross-country skiing. This have mostly been during vacation time, and I do have good memories about outdoor life.”* See Appendix Nr.2. In his story, Anders is talking about how exercising for him has become a way how to enjoy his free time outdoors, e.g., walking with his dogs, cross-country skiing etc., without a strict training schedule like he had in his teenage years. Here we can also easily see the pattern between Anders parents’ lifestyle choices and his own. From his essay, we can see that the activities his parents taught him to enjoy are still the activities he enjoys the most.

Liva also had an example: *“It was my parents who took me to this collective. My mom also danced in a collective. I think that is why she thought I would enjoy it as much as she does, and I did.”* See Appendix Nr. 5. Suzanna’s enthusiasm for horseback-riding also comes from her parents. She writes: *“Both of my parents were training horseback riding professionally until I was 14 .. I learned from my parents all the things I have to know, because I wanted to be just like my parents; I remember when I was little, I also wanted to compete and have my own little farm full with horses.”* See Appendix Nr.9. Suzanna do not own her little far, but she still lives with her parents where she helps them take care of all the animals they have there. Hence, her enthusiasm for horse still has not disappeared.

These are not the only comments from the participants that show that parents’ devotion to exercising has encouraged them to do the same. A perspective that is left for consideration is, what about the students who’s both parents don’t exercise, and why do they exercise despite that. There were only two story-writing participants who were in a situation like this – Thomas and Nick. Thomas in his self-narrative wrote this: *“None of my parents has ever been keen on exercising and both are overweight. Yes, they took me to my first karate lesson but it was me who decided to continue being active, so I do not think my passion for sports is their merit.”* See Appendix Nr.8. To continue, I will discuss here one of the identity types – chosen identity (See Page Nr.16). Here we can see that Thomas has chosen his identity, which is to be an active sportsman. His parents were not an example for him in this area.

However, Nick had a different story. He writes: *“I started swimming because I had problems with my back when I was a child, so the doctors recommended gymnastics or swimming. My parents chose swimming. After some time the doctors said it is not necessary to swim anymore, because I am fine, but that was when my trainer interfered, and told my parents that I had talent and that I should continue, and so I have been swimming for the past 12 years.”* See Appendix Nr.6. In Nick’s case, it was neither of his parents who encouraged him. Even though his parents took him to swimming, he really enjoyed it, and thanks to his trainer, he continued on having great achievements as an athlete.

## 6.3 Changes in mood

There are many benefits from exercising, and one of the most noticeable ones are changes in mood or attitudes.[[5]](#footnote-5) The reason why I decided to research if students have noticed changes in mood is, because mood or attitudes is one of the defining factors for having the character and identity we have.[[6]](#footnote-6) It is a well-known myth that people who exercise get into a better mood, so I wanted to ask the same to my survey respondents and participants who wrote self-narratives. In Chart Nr.5, you can see that variety of respondents – 67% noticed changes in their mood after they started exercising. Even though 27% of the respondents do not remember noticing mood changes, we have to remember that many of the respondents started to exercise actively already when they were 5-13 years old, and now they are students, so there is a probability that they simply do not recall if there were changes in their mood or attitudes.

**Did you notice any changes in your mood after you started exercising?**

Yes

:

**67 %**

No

:

**6 %**

Don't remember

:

**27 %**

**Chart Nr.5 Changes in mood**

Another question I asked in regards to mood changes was, *What kind of mood changes you noticed?* I asked respondents to describe their feelings and attitudes that they experienced. Many of the respondents wrote that they felt happier after they started exercising. Others wrote that they started to have a more positive outlook on life, could focus better on their studies, felt satisfaction with themselves and their body image, became more social, outgoing and confident. Thormod, for example, writes: *“I feel a boost of confidence every time after I have finished exercising. It also feels good after I have done something accelerating, or after I have gotten a good feedback from my teammates or trainer, which eventually makes me happy about the workout I have done.”* See Appendix Nr.10.

In their self-narratives, many participants admitted to have noticed changes in their mood and attitudes. Liva, for instance, writes: *“Even though I feel tired after practices, I feel happy afterwards, and I have come to enjoy the muscle pain, because the feeling that I have exercised brings me joy .. I think that any kind of sports activities improve the mood and overall life quality.”* See Appendix Nr.5. Liva also writes about how she is proud of herself every time she overdoes her limits, and has learned to do a difficult dance movement that improves her abilities.

Thomas writes: *“I cannot live without sports, because I have seen the drastic changes in my mood. I know that without exercising I am a sad and angry person. That is why I better exercise and be a happy, joyful and positive person.* *During the time I was exercising, I also felt like my marks in school got better, I managed to do more things in one day. I was very busy, but efficient .. I was feeling joy and relaxation .. I definitely noticed changes in my mood after I started exercising.”* See Appendix Nr.8. Anita writes: “*I am happier, more focused, with a more positive mind-set and attitude, which helps a lot when I have to study hard.”* See Appendix Nr.3.

Nick, for example, writes: *“Swimming has definitely helped me to become more social, open-minded, friendly and more helpful .. Sometimes I am very angry, grumpy, sad or stressful, and after the training the whole outlook towards life changes .. I become more harmonic, happier and not so worried.”* See Appendix Nr.6. Janis portrays his mood changes this way: *“Because of exercising, I have become more confident in my abilities and my personality. It helped me to become more joyful with myself and with life altogether .. sports activities is a good way how to improve the day, and the best way to forget all the unpleasant and bad moments.”* See Appendix Nr. 4.

If we go back to the student development theory (See Page Nr.26), it is important to remember that transition to the university environment can be stressful for some students, and if a person exercises and gets this great state of mind from it, it can make the transition to a new environment easier and less stressful. It could make it even better if a student applied to sports activities group while in university, because, as I wrote in Multiple social groups theory part, very often individuals seek to define themselves and their social identities through the relationships they have with other persons or with other social groups (See Page Nr.23).

Therefore, if we consider the fifth vector of Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Development (See Page Nr.28) that students in their studying years seek to establish identity; meeting people with the same interests would make the transition and establish identity easier, because having the same interests with other students would make it easier to adapt in a new environment.

## 6.4 Improvements in social skills

I also wanted to know of exercising has influenced students’ social skills. Having a socially developed identity, gives major advantages in the present and in the future, because it can improve students’ networking capabilities, increase happiness among other benefits.[[7]](#footnote-7) We need social skills to communicate and interact with each other, and in the Chart Nr.6, you can see that most of the respondents admitted to have noticed difference in their social skills after they started exercising. Having an identity that is socially developed, can be used as means of interacting with people who share the same values and goals in life; besides, social skills can also help to communicate with people who are not so similar to us.

**Chart Nr.6 Improvements in social skills**

**Do you think exercising has helped you with your social skills?**

Yes

:

**73 %**

No

:

**27 %**

Some of my story participants also wrote about their social skill’s improvement. For instance, Anita writes: *“Apart from the mental and physical benefits exercise has given me, it has also helped my social skills; besides, whenever I exercise outside the house I meet people.”* See Appendix Nr.3. Lene, on the other hand writes: *“I started feeling like a social butterfly .. I have managed to keep that feeling, because of the sports activities.”* See Appendix Nr.7, and Thomas writes: *“Exercising has definitely helped me with my social skills, because after I have had my dosage of daily activity, I feel like I am more outgoing and communicable.”* See Appendix Nr.8. Thormod, however, writes: “*Exercising has also helped me to keep in touch with the friends I already have, because I feel more energetic and social.”* See Appendix Nr.10.

For Liva, dancing is all about social skills: *“Dancing is such a great way to socialize, because in every practice you meet 30 other persons, and you cannot just not talk with them. Besides, when dancing in the couple, one has to communicate with the partner in a way, so there are no misunderstandings.”* See Appendix Nr.5. Liva was also writing about how she thinks that socializing in a big dance collective can be very important for children and youngsters, because that is a great way to develop their communication abilities and how to work together as a group.

Nick also writes that sports activities have improved his social skills, amongst other qualities: *“Swimming has definitely helped me to become more social, open-minded, friendly and more helpful. In practices and in competitions I meet friends, trainers and acquaintances, which has encouraged me to become more social, because I have to be in contact with many different people, who all have one common interest – swimming.”* See Appendix Nr.6.

Nowadays, there are many different ways we can communicate with each other, and technologies have made it easier for us to interact frequently, given that we want to do that. We can see in the Chart Nr.6 and from the self-narratives that students have experienced an improvement in social skills. As discussed in the theory part, it is a part of identity development process where we as persons better ourselves. Therefore, as long as exercising helps identity to progress, one can say that it affects identity in a good way.

Another aspect that is similar to social skill improvement is the increasing number of friends and acquaintances. We cannot live without friends; they are like a supplement to a more happy life. In Chart Nr.7, you can see that most of the respondents admitted that the number of their acquaintances and friends rose as they started exercising, and this can most likely be due to the improvement of social skills. As the person becomes more outgoing and communicative, one gets to know more people, which also is a part of developing and establishing identity.

**Chart Nr.7 Increase in acquaintances and friends**

**Do you think exercising has helped you to gain more acquaintances and friends?**

Yes

:

**59 %**

No

:

**41 %**

The writers of the self-narratives also recognized that. For instance, Janis writes: “*As I was training in a basketball team, and now dancing in a folk dance collective, I have gained many friends, and these activities have helped me to stay more socially interactive.”* See Appendix Nr.4. Lene also writes: *“After I lost the weight, all of a sudden I started to get more friends. At that time, I thought it was because of my weight loss, but now that I think back, I did become more social, positive and outgoing, and acquaintances started to gather all around me. My life became more joyful on daily basis.”* See Appendix Nr.7. Thormod experienced the same: *“I think that exercising has definitely helped me with my social skills, and helped me gain more acquaintances and friends inside my team and in the university”* See Appendix Nr.10.

These comments just prove that exercising not only improve social skills, but can also reward students with more friends. For example, in Liva’s case, she has gained many friends during her sports activities. She writes: *“As I have changed to a different dance collective, my network of acquaintances and friends has also grown, and I have become even more communicative. I still stay in touch with all my friends from the previous collective. I can say that we don’t only meet up to dance, but also visit events together, arrange gatherings with each other at each other’s home, we party together and remember each other’s important events in life, like graduations.”* See Appendix Nr.5.From this comment, we can see that Liva is definitely a part of a great sports collective, which she will doubtfully leave any time soon.

As described in the Multiple social groups theory part (See Page Nr.23), individuals are often a part of multiple groups, which can develop multiple identities. If we speak about groups when they are looked at as groups of friends, then it is considered an intimacy group and small task group. In these groups, the main characteristics are personal ties common interpersonal connections, face-to-face interactions and close bonds. If we take Liva’s case as an example, her dance collective can definitely be described as an intimacy group.

## 6.5 Participation in sports collectives

The next question was important for me to know due to the fact that it shows how many participants are a part of a sports collective/group; henceforth, the results of this questions can show me how many of the participants know how it is to be involved in a specific group, e.g., volleyball team, tennis club, dance collective etc. Not all of the 112 respondents have been a part of a sports activities group. The main goal of my survey was to include people who exercise at least once a week, and I used this question for my curiosity to see if it could lead to something. As of result, many students are a part of a sports team. 38% of the respondents are currently part of a sports team, while 30% used to be a part of one, which has given me good results to research this further, because the respondents who used to be a part of a sports collective could also respond me the following questions concerning this issue.

**Chart Nr.8 Participation in sports activities groups**

No **32 %**

**Are you a part of any sports activities group?**

Yes

:

**38 %**

I used to be

:

**30 %**

In addition, many of my qualitative data participants are or have been a part of a sports activities group. Anders, for example has been a part of a kayak club for a couple of years, and later on has lifted weights with a group of his friends. Janis used to play in basketball team for eight years, and has been a part of a folk dance collective for the past eight years; whereas Liva has danced in a collective for more than 20 years, and Nick has been swimming for the past 12 years now. Lene, Anita and Thomas have been going to the fitness club for a couple of years. Thomas has also done karate for four years, and has been going to a CrossFit club for the past two years. Thormod has been a member of the flag football team for the past couple of years. See Appendixes 2-10. To sum up, I consider myself being lucky with the story writing participants, and the fact that they all have been a part of a sports activities group, which allows me to research the next questions more thoroughly.

To continue, the Chart Nr.9 reflects on whether respondents consider having more in common with their sports collective and with people, they exercise with. Since 32% of 112 respondents answered that they are not and never have been a part of a sports collective, in this question, as well as in the next two questions there are 33 skipped responses. Nevertheless, out of the 78 respondents who did answer, 38% do consider having more in common with people who also exercise or are a part of their sports group, while 62% don’t think so.

We can look at Janis’ comment to elaborate: *“I think being in a collective has helped me to communicate with other group mates, because we had common interests and common training and goals.”* See Appendix Nr.4. Janis as well as other participants, when talking about their sports collective, mention having common interests and training goals, which is mainly one of the most important aspects to have in common in a sports collective. Nevertheless, sometimes as time passes, people find more things in common. Therefore, I would like to elaborate in regards to Brewer’s Social extensions of self (See Page Nr.25).

Having common interests and goals also indicate that persons have similarities, which can also means that these students like their group participants. This can lead to participants becoming friends, because liking one another can bring out the notion that they have also similar attitudes and preferences. However, this attraction mainly happens, because they are in the same sports collective. Very often members from the same group tend to like each other more than members from a different group, even if they do not know that much about one another. Therefore, this liking can be connected more to social attraction – particular group’s characteristics are more attractive for the student than those of the other groups.

**Chart Nr.9 Having things I common with the people in sports collective and people who exercise**

**Do you consider having more in common with people who also exercise or are a part of your sports collective?**

Yes

:

38 %

No

:

62 %

In case that I find out that the participants don’t feel like they have that much in common, I wanted to ask if they even feel like a part of their sports collective, and in Chart Nr.10 you can see the results of that. 44% of participants definitely feel like being a part of their sport’s collective, while 36% feel that only sometimes. Participation and being a part of something is one of the drives that makes us stay in a group, which also indicates that these students feel like being a part of the group. If some participants or 21% of participants do not really feel like being a part of their group, it is more likely that they will leave the group sooner than later, because participation in a group should provide some benefits, so the person keeps on wanting to stay there.

As discussed in the Social group theory part (See Page Nr.19), for persons it is very important to share similar features with their group members in order to feel good in the group. The sense of belongingness actually start very early in life, and as you could see from the previous parts of analysis, many of my qualitative data participants have been in a sports group from an early age.

**Chart Nr.10 Feeling as part of the sports collective**

No **21%**

**Do you feel like being a part of your sports collective?**

Yes

:

**44 %**

Sometimes

:

**36 %**

Thormod for example, refers to his sports team: *“In the flag football team we all have have a common goal and interest in winning with the teammates; therefore, It makes it easier to talk to one another, which gives you a sense of belonging .. but I feel them very different from me .. I feel like being a part of that sports collective only sometimes – when we are about to have a match with someone .. I feel mostly like and outsider .. but still, I feel very welcome, and enjoy spending time with them.”* See Appendix Nr.10. Thormod’s meaning about his participation in the team is very controversy. He feels like a part of the group only sometimes, but when he does, he feels very good there. From Thormod’s story, and his comment, I can understand that he is a part of a large task group. As I wrote in the Multiple social groups theory part (See Page Nr.23), the large task groups are more likely based on the symbolic attachment to the group than personal ties with the group members. Membership in large task groups depersonalize identities. From Thormod’s comment we can see that he feels like having a common bond with the team only during the games, but otherwise he feels like and outsiders and therefore probably doesn’t share his identity so freely.

Even though Anita is not a part of a sports team, she still feels like she is in a group. Anita wrote: *“Even though I am not a part of any sports activities group, whenever I do sports, I strongly feel as a part of a group, which makes me feel integrated in society, i.e., even though I am not a part of a runners club, I still feel like a I have much in common with all the runners I see.”* See Appendix Nr.3.

This only indicates that a person does not necessarily has to be a part of a sports team in order to feel like a member of all the persons who are exercising. This means that if you exercise, you can find things in common with anyone who exercises. Anita’s way of seeing herself shows that the less complex we will make the environment we socialize in, the less complex the society will be.

The next aspect I will discuss, refers to the issues of the in-group – out-group perspective. As Chart Nr.11 shows, 37% of the respondents consider that the sports group they belong to is better in their viewpoint than others, while 63% of all the respondents who are a part of a sports team, think that there are sports groups that are better than the one they belong to. Janis expressed his ideas on the issue: *“I think that every sports collective is diverse, because what sets the environment in the collective is the different personalities of its members. I do not see it as a bad thing, because it teaches us to communicate and trust each other, no matter how different we are.”* See Appendix Nr.4. In his comments, Janis has used the neutral form for expressing his opinions. He considers than none of the sports clubs can be better or worse, they are just different, and what makes them different is the people who are a part of those groups.

Thormod’s opinion is almost the same: *“I don’t think that my flag football team is better than other sports teams, but the fact that they started their own club with their friends, means that they have a better comradeship than some other teams. I generally think that no group can be better than other, each one is just different in their goals and values.”* See Appendix Nr.10. As I wrote in Social group theory part (See Page Nr.19), goals and values are one of the things that usually keep the people staying in the groups. They sense that they have something in common with the rest of the group, but as soon as these common aspects start changing or disappear, or if the person’s goals and values suddenly change, the person will want to leave the group for a different one that suits his/hers current ideal. As I described in Tajfel’s four concepts theory part (See Page Nr.21), a person might think that his/her group is better than other groups, only if the other groups are considered better, or when the individual does not feel like a part of the current group, as in Thormod’s case. If that is the situation, it means that the group is not contributing a positively valued social identity in the eyes of the group member.

**Chart Nr.11 Comparing sports collectives**

**Would you say that the collective you belong to is better in your eyes than other sports collectives are?**

Yes

:

37 %

No

:

63 %

## 6.6 Identity change

I asked 112 respondents if they thought their identity has changed ever since they became students. Respondents were given the definition of identity, so they could comprehend its meaning better, and as Chart Nr.12 shows, 69% of respondents admitted to have noticed change in their identity, and as some of the self-narratives showed, the reason for that could be the sports activities. For instance, Anita writes: “*I became a student and started exercising approximately at the same time, which is why I have a strong feeling that my identity changed drastically ever since I started on university. As I started exercising, I am in much better mood on a daily basis, even if in that particular day I have not trained.”* See Appendix Nr.3.As discussed in the theory part about student development (See Page Nr.26), this kind of positive experience is what influences a stable integration into university’s environment and develops student growth. Besides, as identity develops, social relationships develops with it, and therefore, students becomes increasingly able to act on many different experiences and inspirations. Changing attitudes is a part of student’s growth and development, and identity changes with it.

Another evidence is in Thormod’s story: *“I think my identity has changed quite a lot. I used to be stressed out, doubtful and focused only on studies. However, now, I feel like I am more relaxed and confident, and think that this is partly due to the sports activities, because exercising has helped me when things with studies (or life) got tough.”* See Appendix Nr.10. Transition to university’s atmosphere is not easy for everyone, and can be stressful for many students. That is when identity changes and is being re-examined. As student development studies point out, it is in university when the process of establishing identity is challenged, and the experience of that can be diverse for every student (See Page Nr.26).

Thormod also mentioned this: *“Before I was very unsure and quiet, which makes me think that maybe now I would have had a different personality if it would not be for my friends in university, and for exercising regularly with my flag team.”* See Appendix Nr.10. As I wrote in the social self theory part (See Page Nr.24), when the concept of self changes, i.e., transformation from pupil to student, the goals, interests and motivations of the self changes together with it

**Do you think your identity has changed ever since you became a student?**

Yes

:

**69 %**

No

:

**18 %**

I haven't noticed

:

**13 %**

**Chart Nr.12 Change in identity**

Janis, for instance does not feel like his identity has changed much. He writes: *“If I look back, I do not think my identity has changed much, since when I was in the basketball team until now when I am dancing, and am a student.”* Nevertheless, before that comment, in his essay he wrote: *“Because of exercising I have become more confident in my abilities and my personality. It helped me to become more joyful with myself and with life altogether.”* See Appendix Nr.4. This makes me think that even though Janis has not noticed; his identity has changed due to his sports activities, because of the improvement in his personality and abilities.

However, Lene writes: *“Through my ups and downs and the mix of feelings that I have had regarding my looks, I can definitely say that my identity has changed to the positive side. I have realized that I should never let go of the sports activities, because that is what keeps me positive and social.”* See Appendix Nr.7.

Thomas writes: *“In general, I do not think my identity has changed much ever since I became a student, but I do think that sports activities have a lot to do with my identity. I don’t think I would be the person I am today without exercising.”* See Appendix Nr.8.

Overall, most of my story-writing participants admitted to have noticed change in their identities, and a lot of them connect this change with sports activities. As I could see from participant’s stories, they noticed change as they started exercising; therefore, I think that change from becoming student is just made easier if students exercise during this transition period.

The next aspect I will look at is, if students experience different identities when they are with diverse groups of people, e.g., family, friends, work colleagues etc. In the Chart Nr.13 you can see that 53% of the respondents answered that they think they have different identities in those cases; however, 37% do not think so; whereas 11% don’t know or haven’t noticed such issue. As mentioned in the social identity theory part (See Page Nr.), we are all a part of various social groups and therefore, we have diverse social identities, because we define ourselves by the relationship we have with other persons or with other social groups. My goal with this question was to find out if students realize that they have different identities, and to see if they can recognize with which groups they are different.

**Chart Nr.13 Difference in identities when interacting with diverse groups of people**

**Do you think you have different identities when you interact with different people and social groups?**

Yes

:

**53 %**

No

:

**37 %**

I don't know

:

**11 %**

Lene is one of the story-writing participants who admits to having various identities: *“Sometimes I feel like I am different around diverse people. For instance, my character is not the same when I am with my family, and when I am with my friends, and it is not the same with my work colleagues as well.”* See Appendix Nr.7. Thomas also recognizes his identity diversity: *“When I am communicating, I feel that sometimes I have to wear a different mask in order to fit better together with some people.”* See Appendix Nr.8. Anita agrees on hiding some of her identity on different occasions: *“I think I always have my original identity with me, but I do not always show it fully; therefore, I hide some of my characteristics to fit better in the conversation or in the group.”* See Appendix Nr.3.

Thormod as well writes openly about the different identities he has: “*I have noticed that I have different identities when I interact with my friends or family, or people I do not know.”* Thormod wrote in his story that he is different with his friends and with people he does not know. He has noticed that his character changes without him realizing it. He continues on with writing: *“This is something that exercising has not helped with. I have always been cautious with people I do not know, and very open with my friends and family.”* See Appendix Nr.10.

The last but not the least important question I wanted to find answers to is, if the student think that they have a strong sense of who they are. Some of the students that have responded to this survey are in the beginning of their studies, some are in the middle, and some are close to finishing. Therefore, I thought it would be interesting to see how many of them think that they know who they are. In Chart Nr.14, we can see that 73% of the respondents think that they know who they are. The question that will unfortunately leave hanging here is *Why do they think so*?

**Chart Nr.14 Who are you**

**Do you think you have a strong sense of who you are?**

Yes

:

**73 %**

No

:

**14 %**

I don't know

:

**13 %**

In response to this question, the story-writing participants also had some insights about themselves. Anita writes: *“Being close to finishing my education, I feel that I finally have a strong sense of who I am, but I do not think a lot of people my age feel the same.”* See Appendix Nr.3. Liva also thinks that she is sure of herself. She write: *“I don’t think I would be the confident person I am today, if not for my folk dance collective.”* See Appendix Nr.5.

Suzanna admitted that she had everything figured out from an early age: *“I would say that my identity settled at a very early age, when I was 16, because I knew who I was and what I want to be.”* See Appendix Nr.9. Lene writes: *“Sometimes I am a bit confused about who I am, and what do I want to do with my life.”* See Appendix Nr.7. Thomas writes: *“I think I have a strong sense of who I am in most areas of life.”* See Appendix Nr.8.

As you can see from these sentences, Anita, Liva and Suzanna feel quite confident in their identity, Lene is still quite unsure with herself, and does not really feel comfortable with her identity, and Thomas is on the verge of having it all figured out.

According to the Student identity change theory part (See Page Nr.26), answering question, *“Who am I?”* is the first step to understanding one’s identity and establishing identity. Realization of one’s identity is necessary in order to understand oneself’ and the experiences one goes through. As you can see from the quantitative and qualitative data, many respondents and participants consider that they know who they are, which confirms to me that they have a strong sense of their identity.

# Conclusion

This Thesis was written with the goal to explore how are sports activities affecting students’ identity and social interactions. Throughout the theory and the data gathering process, I discovered that sports activities affect students in many ways, consciously and unconsciously, and, therefore, in the result, activities affect students’ identity and social interactions.

In the beginning of my analysis I asked the survey and self-narrative’s participants if they thought their parents had something to do with students’ passions for sports, and I revealed a pattern between parents’ devotion to exercise and that of their children who are now students. My investigations discovered that many students are encouraged by their parents to exercise - consciously and unconsciously, which has led them to be sports’ enthusiasts, and which has showed me the reasons behind students’ commitment to sports. This is important knowledge, because I discovered that it has led students to start forming their identities from a very young age, which throughout my analysis showed me, that students who started exercising from an early age, have some very strong values in life, and they feel like they have a strong sense of who they are. This information has led me to conclude that parents have had a big influence over students’ dedication for sports; therefore, parents have directly or indirectly affected students’ identities and social interactions.

With the help of quantitative and qualitative data, I have discovered that sports activities have influence over participants’ moods and attitudes towards life. Many survey respondents admitted to have noticed changes in their mood, and, in their essays, many students made more detailed comments about their life before and after sports activities, and mentioned noticing drastic changes in their attitudes. Since moods and attitudes are a huge part of our personalities, I can conclude that this is one of the factors that influence students’ identities.

Another aspect I researched was, if students noticed improvements in their social skills. Many respondents of surveys and self-narratives, answered that ever since they exercise, they have become more social, outgoing and communicative not only in their sports collectives, but also with people they meet daily. Many students also noticed and increase in their friendships, because with having greater social skills’ abilities, they could broaden their social network as well. Many of my survey and essays’ respondents are also a part of a sports collective, which is also considered a social group, and their answers have showed me that the sports groups they belong to have affected their abilities, character and life quality altogether. Respondents mentioned how they are very good friends with their sport group’s members, and how they have stayed friends with these person from since they were little. Therefore, all these answers have led me to conclude that sports activities influence positively social interactions and can also increase the number of friendships.

In my questions, I also asked if respondents’ identities have changed since they became students. Many of them agreed to have noticed an identity change, and some of them also mentioned sports to be one of the factors that encouraged that change. Other respondents mentioned that sports activities have also made the transition to university easier, and that their identity change was like a natural process, where adjusting to a new environment was not stressful. For many of respondents this transition process comes easier also because they are used to social group environment, and have learned to be communicative and social from their sports activities’ groups.

Respondents also pointed out that, because of the sports activities they are more confident about themselves and have a strong sense of who they are, which has led them to a strong sense of identity and personality. As the students’ self-esteem is strong and stable, it makes it easier for them to communicate with others

As you can see from my above-mentioned conclusions, there are many ways how sports activities affect students’ identity and social interactions. Sports activities affect identity and social interactions through the lifestyles of active students’ parents, through the improvement in attitudes that exercising creates, through the social network that sports activities help to generate, through the challenges in life, i.e., new university environments. There are probably many other ways, how sports activities affect identity and social interaction. The only question left here is, how are the identities and social interactions of students’ who do not do sports. Maybe their identities are the same even though they do not have sports in their lives. Maybe other afterschool activities, e.g., arts, music school, affect students the same way. These are the questions still left open for exploration in a different study.

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# Appendixes

## 9.1 Appendix Nr.1 Questionnaire

1. **How many times a week do you exercise?**

* Once
* Twice
* Three times
* More than three times

1. **From what age did you start exercising frequently? E.g., tennis, swimming, volleyball, dancing. Gym lessons in school don't count**

* Age 5-7
* Age 8-10
* Age 11-13
* Age 14-16
* Age 17-19
* Age 20-22
* Age 23-25
* Age 26-27

1. **Are your parents devoted to sports activities?**

* Yes
* No
* Only one of them

1. **Do you think that your parent's devotion to exercising has encouraged you to do the same?**

* Yes
* No
* Maybe

1. **Did you notice any changes in your mood after you started exercising?**

* Yes
* No
* I don’t remember

1. **What kind of mood improvements did you experience?**

………….………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

1. **Do you think exercising has helped you with your social skills?**

* Yes
* No

1. **Do you think exercising has helped you to gain more acquaintances and friends?**

* Yes
* No

1. **Are you a part of any sports activities group? For example, volleyball team, tennis club, dancing crew**

* Yes
* No
* I used to be

1. **Do you consider having more in common with people who also exercise or are a part of your sports collective?**

* Yes
* No

1. **Do you feel like being a part of your sports collective?**

* Yes
* No
* Sometimes

1. **Would you say that the collective you belong to is better in your eyes than other sports collectives are?**

* Yes
* No

1. **Do you think your identity has changed ever since you became a student?**

* Yes
* No
* I haven’t noticed

1. **Would you say that you have different identities when you interact with different people and social groups?**

* Yes
* No
* I don’t know

1. **Do you think you have a strong sense of who you are?**

* Yes
* No
* I don’t know

1. **If you would be willing to write a story/essay about your relationship with sports activities, please leave your e-mail below.**

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

## 9.2 Appendix Nr. 2 Anders’ story (Age 22)

I started exercising at a very early age. Since I can remember, I have been “swimming”, back to the point of me being carried around the pool, so 3 years old would be my guess. I was swimming from then until I was 11-12 years old and decided to stop swimming. At that point, I had been doing competitive swimming for a few years, but the swimming became repetitive for me. After some time I started doing kayaking, and I still do kayaking to this day. In retro perspective, it does make more sense for me to do kayaking. My family has never really been into sports but both my mom and father have been doing outdoor activities like hiking, camping, cross-country skiing. This have mostly been during vacation time, and I do have good memories about outdoor life. Kayaking was very much the same when I started. At that point, we went on several kayaking trips out to different places.

A few years after I started kayaking I began exercising a lot. Even though I had been doing competitive swimming this was a whole other thing. I was exercising 12 times a week, waking up at half past 5 in the morning to go and lift weights every day before school. Looking back, I was never really into the competitive part, but the companionship was very good. I had a friend I worked out with and we had a great time. After some years, again I stopped kayaking competitively. And at this point I am back to where I started, as mentioned I still do kayaking, but the purpose of it is to enjoy being outside and on the water.

In regards to identity, I identify myself through the ways that I choose to exercise. When I exercise now, exercising itself is not the purpose. Exercising has just become a way of enjoying the outdoors, whether it is walking my dogs, kayaking, cross-country skiing or hiking. I have never put my foot in a fitness center, and I probably will not do that any time soon. As I mentioned, identity for me does play a role in this regard. I do not understand why people go exercising because the bath weight tells them to even though they do not want to. I remember that even the famous Danish/American guy Chris Mcdonald says he hates exercising, but likes the results. For me that is a general sign of how exercising is a run against the calories and not a lifestyle where you can take your time doing something you enjoy.

## 9.3 Appendix Nr. 3 Anita’s story (Age 23)

I have never been the type of person to exercise extra in my free time, until I started university. That is when I started to go to gym more often. I was 18 years old back then, and still remember how much better I started to feel. Maybe that is why I continued exercising, because ever since I started, I am in much better mood on a daily basis, even if in that particular day I haven’t trained. I sleep better now, and have more energy and higher motivation. I feel how exercising has improved my character and personality; I amhappier, more focused, with a more positive mind-set and attitude, which helps a lot when I have to study hard. I do not schedule my sports activities strictly. At wintertime, I have a monthly card to sports club, and I got there at least 2-4 times a week, but when the winter is over, I go running outside or do gymnastics at home at least 1-2 a week. I also like to do meditation exercises once in two weeks, because I think it helps as much as other sports activities. I have noticed it helps me with concentration, relaxation and focus.

My parents have never pushed me towards exercising. My dad plays basketball since he was a teenager, and he is still playing, even though he is 65 years old now, so it has definitely showed me and taught me the values my parents have and the benefits that can come from working out.

Apart from the mental and physical benefits exercise has given me, it has also helped my social skills; besides, whenever I exercise outside the house I meet people, and we always share our opinions about health and welfare, and how to improve each other’s training experiences. With some of the people, I have even stayed in touch. We have been running together afterwards and even partied together. Even though I am not a part of any sports activities group, whenever I do sports, I strongly feel as a part of a group, which makes me feel integrated in society, i.e., even though I am not a part of a runners club, I still feel like a I have much in common with all the runners I see.

I became a student and started exercising approximately at the same time, which is why I have a strong feeling that my identity changed drastically. Being close to finishing my education, I feel that I finally have a strong sense of who I am, but I do not think a lot of people my age feel the same. When I started to study, I realized that this is the breaking point when I become fully responsible of my actions in education and work. The same goes for the willingness to stay healthy, because you cannot be successful without a good health, and you can get good health only from eating healthy and exercising frequently.

Even though I think I have the same identity with everybody I communicate with, I still need to adjust to the way people would understand me. In some cases, I would joke a lot, and people would laugh with me, but in other groups, jokes are not understood the same way. I think I always have my original identity with me, but I do not always show it fully; therefore, I hide some of my characteristics to fit better in the conversation or in the group.

## 9.4 Appendix Nr.4 Janis’ story (Age 21)

**English version**

Sport activities hold a big meaning in my life. I believe that it is never too late to start exercising, but it is better still to start in an early childhood, because that is how love and passion for sports activities gets created. If I think about it, I can conclude that sport has given me a lot more than I would think.

I have been active, since I remember myself. I started to play basketball since I was eight years old until I was sixteen, and started performing in the folk dance collective when I was 14. Now I am still dancing in a folk dance collective twice a week, and run and swim at least once a week. Besides that, I live in the countryside, and there is always something to do and chores to finish and it is not like picking flowers. Its heavy lifting of potato bags, carrot boxes etc.

In the beginning I thought of basketball practices as a job that I have to do, but with time I understood that because of basketball and other sports activities, I had the chance to stay on a straight road as a teenager. I saw how a lot of other teenagers at my age did nothing with their free time, and sometimes I wanted to do the same, but now I can see how it has hurt them in the long run, and I thank my parents for directing me towards sports activities. My mom has never exercised, but my dad always invited me with him, when he went out for a run or went swimming. It was like our father-son activity. I think it was due to his encouragement that I enjoy exercising so much.

As any kind of activity, exercising benefits not only physical but also mental development. Exercising is a positive thing that reflects on persons who exercise at least weekly. Because of exercising I have become more confident in my abilities and my personality. It helped me to become more joyful with myself and with life altogether.

I am trying to exercise at least 2-4 times a week at least for one hour. Every time I have finished my exercising routine, I feel I have a positive tiredness and satisfaction with myself as if I have done a very good deed. As I was training in a basketball team, and now dancing in a folk dance collective, I have gained many friends, and these activities have helped me to stay more socially interactive. I think being in a collective has helped me to communicate with other group mates, because we had common interests and common training and goals. I think that every sports collective is diverse, because what sets the environment in the collective is the different personalities of its members. I do not see it as a bad thing, because it teaches us to communicate and trust each other, no matter how different we are. If I look back, I do not think my identity has changed much, since when I was in the basketball team until now when I am dancing, and am a student. All I can say in the end is that from my viewpoint, sport activities is a good way how to improve the day, and the best way to forget all the unpleasant and bad moments.

**Latvian version**

Sportam ir samērā liela nozīme manā, kā arī citu cilvēku ikdienas dzīvē. Es uzskatu, ka ar sportu nodarboties nekad nav par vēlu, bet labāk to darīt jau agrā bērnībā, tā, manuprāt, izveidojas mīlestība pret sportu un aktivitātēm kā tādām. Nedaudz aizdomājoties var secināt, ka sports devis daudz vairāk kā varētu šķist sākotnēji.

Esmu sportojis gandrīz vai kopš sevi atceros, sākotnēji, no 8 gadu vecuma spēlēju basketbolu, bet pašlaik dejoju, peldu, retu reizi arī skrienu. Sākotnēji basketbola treniņus uzskatīju kā darbu, bet laikam ejot, sapratu, ka pieturoties pie sportošanas ārpus skolas tas man ir ļāvis izprast dzīves rutīnas, iemācījis plānot savu laiku, kā arī nepievērsties dažādiem citiem ne tik labiem dzīves aicinājumiem. Kā jau jebkura veida treniņi, tie veicina fizisko, un garīgo attīstību. Attīstība ir pozitīva parādība, tas bieži vien atspoguļojas ikdienā, sports palīdz gūt pašpārliecinātību par savām spējām, kas uzlabo dienu un dzīvi kopumā.

Ar sportu cenšos nodarboties, 2-4 reizes nedēļā vismaz 1 stundu. Katru reizi pēc fiziskām aktivitātēm sajūtu sevī pozitīvu nogurumu, gandarījuma sajūtu, kā pēc labi padarīta darba. Tā kā trenējos basketbola komandā un dejoju deju kolektīvā esmu ieguvis daudz draugu, kas palīdz būt sociāli aktīvākam. Pavisam noteikti vieglāk komunicēt ar cilvēkiem, ja jums ir kopīga interese, ikdienas nodarbe. Uzskatu, ka katrs sportistu kolektīvs ir savādāks, jo ir dažādas personības, kuras nosaka vidi kolektīvā. Ja atskatos uz sevi redzu, ka neesmu daudz mainījies kopš esmu kādas komandas sastāvā. Neskatoties uz to uzskatu, ka tas nav slikti un beigu beigās darbs komandā mums iemāca komunicēt un paļauties citam uz citu. Beigās varu piebilst, ka sports manā skatījumā ir labs veids kā uzlabot dienu tāpat arī palīdzēt aizmirst nepatīkamos, sliktos brīžus.

## 9.5 Appendix Nr. 5 Liva’s story (Age 27)

I have been dancing in a folk dance collective since I was 4-5 years old. It was my parents, who took me to this collective. My mom also danced in a collective. I think that is why she thought I would enjoy it as much as she does, and I did. As far as I remember, I have always looked forward to go to dance practices. Most of the weeks we had dance classes 3-4 times a week, but not that I have changed my previous dance collective to another, we have practices twice a week. Sometimes I also try out diverse dancing styles, e.g., ballet or ballroom dancing, to improve my dancing technique and increase my strength.

I am very happy that my parents introduced me to dancing option, and happy for having this kind of hobby with which I can keep myself healthy and in shape. It is hard to imagine my life without dancing. Even though I feel tired after practices, I feel happy afterwards, and I have come to enjoy the muscle pain, because the feeling that I have exercised brings me joy. I also feel good after I have managed to do some difficult movement with my body, because that means that I have reached and overreached my limits, which always makes me proud of myself.

I think that any kind of sports activities improve the mood and overall life quality. Dancing is such a great way to socialize, because in every practice, you meet 30 other persons, and you cannot just not talk with them. Besides, when dancing in the couple, one has to communicate with the partner in a way, so there are no misunderstandings. I think socializing in a big dance collective is especially important for children and youngsters, so they can develop their communication abilities, and so they can learn how to adjust to the groups they are in.

As I have changed to a different dance collective, my network of acquaintances and friends has also grown, and I have become even more communicative. I still stay in touch with all my friends from the previous collective. I can say that we don’t only meet up to dance, but also visit events together, arrange gatherings with each other at some friend’s place, we party together and remember each other’s important events in life, like graduations. I can say that with people from my old collective, I think I will stay in touch forever, because we have all danced together since we were little, both boys and girls.

When I started studying in the university, I noticed that it was easier for me to start the conversation with other students, than it was for others, who I knew did not do any sports activities. That is why I really appreciate that I have had the opportunity to dance and to meet so many good people in my life, because I do not think I would be the confident person I am today, if not for my folk dance collective.

## 9.6 Appendix Nr.6 Nick’s story (Age 19)

**English version**

I am a first year's student in Latvia's Sea Academy, and ever since I am a student, I have less time for my passion – swimming. However, throughout the last 10 years I have participated in many swimming competitions, and been honored with medals for my success in Latvia and abroad. I can say that everything I have gained, is thanks to swimming, because it has helped developed my personality.

I started swimming when I was seven years old. In earlier years I had practices at least 6 times a week, but now it’s down to twice a week. Swimming has definitely helped me to become more social, open-minded, friendly and more helpful. In practices and in competitions I meet friends, trainers and acquaintances, which has encouraged me to become more social, because I have to be in contact with many different people, who all have one common interest – swimming. Of course, I also develop more meaningful contact with other people, if there are other similar interests in common. Swimming has also taught me to be more helpful. For example, in training or competitions sometimes occurs a misfortune with training partners, where one has to react fast to go help.

I started swimming because I had problems with my back when I was a child, so the doctors recommended gymnastics or swimming. My parents chose swimming. After some time the doctors said it is not necessary to swim anymore, because I am fine, but that was when my trainer interfered, and told my parents that I had talent and that I should continue, and so I have been swimming for the past 12 years. With time, the trainer becomes not only a person who is responsible for the physical capabilities and training, but also a person who becomes a friend, moral support, which helps in competitions and also in everyday life. I could say that trainer is like a psychologist, mother and father – a superhuman, who can do all the physical preparation, be a support and advisor at the same time.

Deliberately or unintentionally, every swimmer is taught, and brought up with discipline. In general, I think that every person who does any kind of sports activity or goes to other outside of school activities, or institutions, learn discipline, because there is an exact time for training, to which one has to appear on time and there are assignments that one has to fulfill for every training. Training is like a physical job that disciplines, because you know that you have to work hard in order to reach you goals.

I think that every athlete is reaching for his/her own personal goal and wishes to achieve the best results possible. It is the same with me, and it is due to the confidence that physical training has given me. The better I have prepared, the more confident I am about my capabilities. Sometimes it seems to me that I cannot swim that well, but when I stay behind someone only by a hundreth, I understand that I can, and afterwards try even harder to train myself to beat my previous result.

The opportunity to travel around to different countries and to live in different families has made me more social. This opportunity opens the panorama to life as such, and makes it easier to socialize not only with my friends and training mates, but also with completely strange persons. Travelling also gives a chance to get to know other countries' cultures, which has showed me that there are different people and characters and different thinking styles.

One of the main best things swimming has given me is good health. Swimming develops correct posture and creates an athletic body. Doing any kind of sports activity, a person can improve the physical condition; hence, health. One get more awake, and can do more things.

With swimming, one can learn to count with other person's interests. If the swimmer is good enough, then there is an opportunity that he is asked to participate in team's relay race. For example, I am swimming short distances, but I am a good swimmer; therefore, I am asked to help out at relay races, which put on a great responsibility. You are not alone anymore, and from you depends other people and the overall team's result. There are also competitions, where all the team swimmer's gained points are counted all together, and then the whole team's result depends on your own; therefore, it matters to be at your best. Of course, if one is not a good swimmer than it is not expected to get a good result, but if you have already proven yourself, then everyone expects the best results from you, and you do not want to disappoint your team.

Swimming also helps to release the stress. Sometimes I am very angry, grumpy, sad or stressful, and after the training the whole outlook towards life changes. It is due to me putting out all my strength and anger that has built up during the day, and that way I become more harmonic, happier and not so worried. This can be achieved not only by swimming, but also by the people you meet in training. But as we all know, with physical activities one releases the happiness hormone – endorphin. Therefore, in the result, and unintentionally, I become happier after my practices.

I can say that swimming has taught me all the above-mentioned qualities. Swimming and these qualities have definitely helped me to choose my profession and academy, because the combination of these qualities is quite versatile, which means that I have developed fully, because these qualities has disciplined me, made me open-minded and social and have developed my way of thinking. It is a shame that now I cannot dedicate as much time for training as before, but I go swimming anyway as often as I can. However, I still train and compete, because I know how much swimming can help me physically and mentally.

**Latvian version**

Esmu pirmā kursa stundents Latvija Jūras akadēmijā, šobrīd vairs neatliek tik daudz laika savai kādreizējai, ļoti nopietnajai nodarbei – peldēšanai. Esmu Latvijas Meistars peldēšanā. Var apgalvot, ka viss, ko esmu ieguvis nodarbojoties ar peldēšanu, ir veicinājis manu personības veidošanos.

Es sāku peldēt otrās klases otrajā semestrī. Sākumā, bija treniņi sešas reizes nedēļā. Tagad sanāk papeldēt tikai divreiz nedēļā. Peldēšana viennozīmīgi man palīdzējusi kļūt sabiedriskākam, atvērtākam, draudzīgākam, izpalīdzīgākam. Gan treniņos, gan sacensībās ir jāsatiekas ar draugiem, treneriem, paziņām, kas veicina to, ka cilvēks kļūst sabiedriskāks, jo kontaktējas ar daudz un dažādiem cilvēkiem, kurus vieno kopīga interese – peldēšana. Protams, ar citiem izveidojas ciešāks kontakts, ja ir arī citas līdzīgas intereses. Peldēšana arī palīdz būt izpalīdzīgākam, jo sacensībās vai treniņos gadās, kāda nelaime, kurā treniņbiedram jāsteidz palīgā.

Viss sākās ar to ka man bija muguras problēmas un ārsti ieteica mani vest un sporta vingrošanu vai peldēšanu, un mani vecāki izvēlējās peldēšanu. Kādu pus gadu peldēju un ārsts teica, ka mugurai ir labāk un ka vairāk nav vajadzība peldēt, bet tad mana trenere iejaucās un pateica, NĒ, ka man ir talants un man ir jāpaliek. Tā nu paliku pēdējos 12 gadus. Ar laiku treneris vairs nav persona, kas atbild par fizisko sagatavotību un uzdod dažādus vingrinājumus, bet gan kļūst par draugu, morālo atbalsta devēju, kas noteikti palīdz gan sacensībās, gan ikdienā. Varētu teikt, ka treneris ir psihalogs, tētis vai mamma – supercilvēks orķestris, kurā ietilpt gan fiziskās sagatavošanas nodrošināšana, gan atbalsta un padomdevēja funkcijas.

Disciplīna ir tā, kas tīšām vai nejauši tiek ieaudzināta katrā no peldētājiem, kā arī, ja runā plašāk, tad katram cilvēkam, kurš nodarbojas ar kādu sporta veidu vai apmeklē dažādus ārpusskolas pulciņus, iestādes, jo ir noteikts laiks, kad ir treniņš, uz kuru ir jāierodas, ir jāpilda trenera dotie uzdevumi. Treniņi, kā tādi, ir fizisks darbs, kas ļoti disciplinē, jo zini, ka ir jāstrādā smagi un kārtīgi, lai sasniegtu savus uzstādītos mērķus.

Cilvēks, būdams sportists, tiecas pēc sava mērķa – sasniegt labākus rezultātus. Arī es tā daru, to palīdz sasniegt pašpārliecinātība, ko veido fiziskā sagatavotība. Jo labāk esmu sagatavots jo esmu pārliecinātāks par savām spējām. Dažreiz ir licies, ka es nevaru tik labi nopeldēt, taču tad, kad no kāda atpalieku tikai par simtdaļu, es saprotu, ka es to varu un cenšos vēl vairāk.

Sociālākam palīdz kļūt arī iespēja braukāt uz dažādām valstīm, dzīvot ģimenēs, kas arī paver gan skatu uz dzīvi kopumā, gan palīdz vēl vieglāk socializēties ne tikai ar saviem draugiem un treniņu biedriem, bet arī pilnīgi svešiem cilvēkiem. Tādejādi arī ir iespēja iepazīt citu tautu kultūras, kas paver plašāku skatu uz dzīvi, atsķirīgiem cilvēkiem un domāšanas veidiem.

Viens no svarīgākajiem peldēšanas sporta devumiem ir veselības uzlabošana. Nodarbojoties ar peldēšanu, cilvēks attīsta pareizu stāju, veidojas atlētisks ķermenis. Nodarbojoties ar jebkuru fizisku aktivitāti cilvēks uzlabo savu fizisko stāvokli, tādējādi uzlabojas arī veselība. Cilvēks kļūst možāks, spēj izdarīt vairāk.

Nodarbojoties ar peldēšanu, cilvēks iemācās rēķināties ar citu cilvēku interesēm. Ja pledētājs ir pietiekami labs, tad ir iespēja, ka viņu, piemēram, iesaista komandas stafetē. Piemēram, es peldu īsās distances, bet esmu labs peldētājs, tādēļ manu palīdzību lūdz arī stafetē, kas uzliek atbildību, jo vairs neesi viens, no tevis ir atkarīgi arī citi cilvēki un visas komandas rezultāts kopumā. Kā arī ir sacensības, kurās iegūtos peldētāju punktus pieskaita visai komandai, tad arī startēšana savā disciplīnā var izšķirt komandas kopējo punktu skaitu, tātad arī tad nav vienalga, kā nostartē. Protams, ja neesi labs peldētājs, tad no Tevis arī nesagaida labu rezultātu, taču, ja esi sevi jau pierādījis, tad domā par to, ka nevar pievilt komandu.

Peldēšana palīdz atbrīvoties no stresa. Dažreiz, kad esmu dusmīgs, saīdzis, noskumis vai stresa pārpilns, pēc treniņa apmeklēšanas mainās skats uz dzīvi. To veicina tas, ka treniņā izlieku visu savu spēku un niknumu, kas sakrājies dienas laikā, tādējādi es kļūstu harmoniskāks, laimīgāks un ne tik uztraukts. To izdarīt palīdz ne tikai peldēšana, bet arī cilvēki, ko satieku treniņā. Bet, kā jau zināms, nodarbojoties ar fiziskām aktivitātēm izdalās laimes homons – endorfīns. Tas nozīmē, ka pašam negribot es kļūstu laimīgāks pēc treniņiem, jo nodarbojoties ar sportu cilvēks pats nespēj ietekmēt šī hormona izdalīšanos.

Var sacīt, ka peldēšana man ir ieaudzinājusi visas no augstāk minētajām īpašībām. Tās viennozīmīgi man ir palīdzējušas ceļā uz manis izvēlēto profesiju, akadēmiju, jo šo īpašibu apvienojums ir pietiekami daudzpusīgs, kas nozīmē, ka esmu izveidojies pilnvērtīgi, jo īpašības, kas šeit ir pieiminētas gan disciplinē, gan padara pietiekami atvērtu un sociālu, kā arī attīsta domāšanu. Žēl, ka šobrīd neiznāk tik daudz laika veltīt peldēšanai, bet tik un tā, cik daudz iespējams, dodos uz treniņiem un piedalos dažādās sacensībās, jo zinu, cik ļoti šis sporta veids man palīdz gan fiziski, gan arī garīgi.

## 9.7 Appendix Nr.7 Lene’s story (Age 26)

I have been around sport's activities ever since I was little. My dad used to play professional badminton, so he took me with him to his championships ever since I was 5 years old. It all seemed very exciting to me. I rooted for my dad, and got to talk with many people, who also wanted to teach me a bit of badminton. My mom on the other hand, was not so fond of exercising; she was more dedicated to housework and plants. She used to do a bit of yoga, but only for a little while.

Later, when I turned seven, my dad started to take me to swimming pool twice a week, so I could learn how to swim, and that turned into a weekly activity. That was an activity I did together with my dad, because my mom did not know how to swim, and still does not. She goes into a swimming pool maybe three times a year and it just to does some water aerobics. Since I was not planning to become a professional swimmer, I quit swimming when I turned 14 and turned more seriously to my musical activities, because at that age I was planning to become a flute player, and continue with musical career.

In my adolescence I was very chubby, and my dad always suggested me ways how to keep myself in shape, but I wasn't very motivated to do so, because I was sad about my weight, and did not like my dad pushing me to be active. I was also bullied in school because of it. My dad's nagging and situation in school made me feel depressed, and the only joy I could find was by playing flute. Nevertheless, sports activities were always around, because my dad ran every other day and kept on encouraging me to do the same. Since I did not like running, I decided to apply to a fitness club when I was 16, where I did aerobics twice a week. After starting that, I also started to eat healthier, and in the result, I lost a lot of weight. After I lost the weight, all of a sudden I started to get more friends. At that time, I thought it was because of my weight loss, but now that I think back, I did become more social, positive and outgoing, and acquaintances started to gather all around me. My life became more joyful on daily basis. At that point, I got some good friends, who are still in my life now, eight years later. In addition, I cannot help to wonder, if it was all sports that lifted my spirits so much.

In the end, I decided not to follow my musical path, and started my studies in a university in a different country. The first half a year was very exciting, and I had some good friends who were exchange students. However, after my friends left, I realized that I have not met any other friends, and the rest of the students were already socializing in their own little groups that I did not want to be a part of, so I started to become like some kind of an outsider. Even though I talked with my course mates, no one felt to me like a real friend, and I started to get very depressed because of it, because I had so many friends in the earlier years. At that point, I had not exercised for two years. My eating habits also changed. I started eating a lot of junk food, and in no less than 3 months, I had gained 15 kilos, very bad mood and a super lonely feeling. At that point, I was living in a place that was very far away from the center, which was where all the student parties were happening, and no one that I knew was living nearby. Because I had no friends, ugly thoughts started to creep into my mind. My self-esteem was damaged. Because I was a foreign student from Estonia, I had the sense that Danish people do not like me, because I am an East-European. I thought that they were judging me because of my foreign inheritage.

It took me a year until I found an apartment that was closer to center and that was when my luck changed. I moved in with two girls who were also studying, one of them was Danish, and the other from Slovakia. They liked going out, and they always invited me with them. I had a very good connection with them. The Danish girl was very nice, communicative and intelligent, and finally I felt like there is at least one Dane that accepts me for sure. These girls were eating healthy, and went out running occasionally, which somehow made me more active. Because of this interaction I applied again to a fitness center, and for some inexplicable reason all of the sudden I was motivated to exercise. I went to aerobics, lifted weights, did yoga, and danced Zumba etc. Whatever I could think of, I did it. Together with my fitness activities, my weight reduced yet again, and I started feeling like a social butterfly. I felt like everyone liked me again and that I was a part of a group that accepts me. In addition, I have managed to keep that feeling, because of the sports activities.

Sometimes I still feel like I am different around diverse people. For instance, my character is not the same when I am with my family, and when I am with my friends, and it is not the same with my work colleagues as well. Maybe that is why, sometimes I am a bit confused about who I am, and what do I want to do with my life. However, through my ups and downs and the mix of feelings that I have had regarding my looks, I can definitely say that my identity has changed to the positive side. I have realized that I should never let go of the sports activities, because that is what keeps me positive and social.

## 9.8 Appendix Nr.8 Thomas’ story (Age 25)

My relationship with sports started when I was 8 years old, when my parents took me to a karate club, and I kept training until I was 12 years old. Later I became inactive for 3-4 years, because I was playing online computer games like Everquest, WoW, which seemed a lot more interesting activity to do at that point. I started training very seriously almost 12 years ago. My parents had weight at home, and one summer day I was shocked when I saw it had reached the 100kg mark. I think it was junk food and traditional Danish food that led me to that condition. I have always been super active, but the calorie intake was too high, which resulted me putting on too much weight. However, it also blessed me with great strength as my body had the necessary fuel and more. Therefore, I decided to start something I was good at. I changed my diet, started training in the local fitness center 7-10 times a week, and lost all my weight (100kg to 75 kg). When I went back to school after summer holiday all of my classmates were amazed about my transformation, as I had lost almost 15kg over summertime. Since then I have been devoted to Fitness training, and especially to Cross Fit, and am exercising 5-7 times a week.

None of my parents has ever been keen on exercising and both are overweight. They do not really have time to exercise, because they are busy working, and after they come home, they have no energy left for activities, so I do not think my passion for sports is their merit. Yes, they took me to my first karate lesson but it was me who decided to continue being active.

After I lost all that weight, I kept enjoying fitness training for almost eight solid years, transitioning into more weight lifting oriented training. I remember being more goal-oriented and focused on my training. During the time I was exercising, I also felt like my marks in school got better, I managed to do more things in one day. I was very busy, but efficient. However, I started to lose the motivation to go harder, which I would say is one of the most important parts of any sports. My training had become a sad routine, where I knew when I had to increase the weight on the bars and when not to.

I knew I had to start doing something else, so joined Cross Fit classes with my friend. However, it was not me, I just did not get why they liked the training, so I skipped Cross Fit, went back to Fitness World and kept training regularly to stay healthy (not seeking any improvements etc.). When I started in my new school in 2012, I met a super nice Chinese guy, who introduced me to Cross Fit again. However, this time I was a bit stronger and more fit than last time, and my alcohol intake was way lower. I really enjoyed Cross Fit, but it was hard. The first two months were harder than drills in the army. Somehow this madness, increased hormones in my body I could not get elsewhere and it still does. Because of my Cross Fit activities I was feeling joy and relaxation afterwards, which I could not get from simple fitness. After I got used to Cross Fit, I felt like I could do anything in the world, because the training in the beginning was difficult, but it was worth it.

I definitely noticed changes in my mood after I started exercising. When I was 8 years old, karate made me more social, hence happy, and I got to know other children in my age who did the same. It was fun spending time there with them. Now I exercise, because it is good for me. I have the Irritable Bowel Syndrome disease, and I have to use exercising to create a natural flow in the bowel; meaning, I can live without hard symptoms of my disease. Therefore, I keep exercising because of my disease and because I want to keep myself in shape, because I do not want to gain all that weight again. Besides, I cannot live without sports, because I have seen the drastic changes in my mood. I know that without exercising I am a sad and angry person. That is why I better exercise and be a happy, joyful and positive person.

I think exercising is necessary, healthy and fun way to improve one’s life. Exercising has definitely helped me with my social skills, because after I have had my dosage of daily activity, I feel like I am more outgoing and communicable. However, when I exercise I am too focused to communicate. I have some friends I exercise with, but I have met them outside the gym. Therefore, exercising has helped us to keep together, since we no longer go to the same school or university. I am not a part of any Cross Fit group, and frankly, I do not have much in common with people who also do Cross fit, nor do I feel a part of the sports club I go to. Maybe it is so, because I do not communicate with other people so much, because it is enough for me with the company of my friends. However, I do think that the club I got to is better than other clubs in many aspects.

In general, I do not think my identity has changed much ever since I became a student, but I do think that sports activities have a lot to do with my identity. I don’t think I would be the person I am today, without exercising. Sometimes I notice myself changing personalities because of the people I communicate with. I can feel there is a gap between me and other people. When I am communicating, I feel that sometimes I have to wear a different mask in order to fit better together with some people, but all in all I think I have a strong sense of who I am in most areas of life

## 9.9 Appendix Nr. 9 Suzanna’s story (Age 22)

I remember when I was seven years old, my mum and dad surprised me with the biggest gift I could imagine – my own little horse. I had always wished for one, and now I had one of my own. I called her Chou-Chou. They taught me how to take care of her, because both of my parents were training horseback riding professionally until I was 14. Now they are training others to ride horses, and are judging in competitions. They had invested in their own little farm, where we had four horses that they used for their competitions. I have always been around horses, and watched my parents compete, went with them to almost every event not only in Germany, but to countries nearby, so I learned from my parents all the things I have to know, because I wanted to be just like my parents; I remember when I was little, I also wanted to compete and have my own little farm full with horses ever since I was little.

Having my own horse taught me responsibility, discpline and affection to animals from a very small age. To take care of a horse is not an easy task; you have to, wash it, brush it, feed it, clean the space around it, walk it, ride it etc. Of course, in the beginning my parents helped me out a lot, but with time I learned to do all these things by myself, because I wanted to responsibilize myself for the horse, because afterall, she was my horse now. My parents also taught me to ride Chou-Chou since a very little age, and trained us both for my competitions all the way up to the time I had to go to univeristy.

Riding and training a horse was a hard physical and mental task. As I became older, I became more focused, goal-oriented, tolerant, and a hardworking adolescent who knew what she wants and how to get it. I would say that my identity settled at a very early age, when I was 16, because I knew who I was and what I want to be.

Already in childhood I developed love for animals. As we lived in a farm, apart from the horses,we had chickens, a cow, two cats and two dogs. Through the teenage age and all the way up to university I was close to animals, learned their language and was curious about animal nature. Maybe that is why I decided to become a veterinary, and I haven't regretted that decision. Even though I don't compete anymore, I still live in the countryside with my parents, because it is close to the city where I have university. I still take care of the animals there and help out my parents.

I think that the discipline and responsibility I experienced already from childhood taught me patience, relaxation and tolerance and taught me some good values in life.

## 9.10 Appendix Nr. 10 Thormod’s story (Age 24)

I started exercising more frequently since I was 12 years old. Now that I am a student, I exercise 1-2 times a week. I play something called flag football, and run at least once a week. If I think back on why I started exercising, I suppose it was partially because of the initiative from my dad. Even though my parents were not very devoted to sports activities, my dad played football some weekends, and he took me with him from time to time. I do not think my dad somehow influenced me of pressured me to exercise. I just remember that I was thinking that I should also do something active like my dad does, even though it was not football. I do not remember if I had any changes in mood back then when I started running; however, now I feel a boost of confidence everytime after I have finished exercising. It also feels good after I have done something accelerating, or after I have gotten a good feedback from my teammates or trainer, which eventually makes me happy about the workout I have done.

I think that exercising has definitely helped me with my social skills, and helped me gain more acquaintances and friends inside my team, and in the university. It has also helped me to keep in touch with the friends I already have, because I feel more energetic and social. In the flag football team we all have a common goal and interest in winning with the teammates; therefore, It makes it easier to talk to one another, which gives you a sense of belonging. In the team, I have met people who I would normally avoid, because they are not that kind of persons I would socialize with daily, because I feel them very different from me. However, when we play flag football everyone is made a part of the team, with a goal in common. Nevertheless, I feel like being a part of that sports collective only sometimes – when we are about to have a match with someone. I feel mostly like and outsider, because my teammates know each other from when they were children, and have a very strong bond, but still, I feel very welcome, and enjoy spending time with them.

I do not think that my flag football team is better than other sports teams, but the fact that they started their own club with their friends, means that they have a better comradeship than some other teams. I generally think that no group can be better than other, each one is just different in their goals and values.

I think my identity has changed quite a lot. I am studying medicine, and in the beginning of my studies, it was hard, because I had very high expectations of myself. I used to be stressed out, doubtful and very focused only on studies. However, now, I feel like I am more relaxed and confident, and think that this is partly due to the sports activities, because exercising has helped me when things with studies (or life) got tough.

I have noticed that I have different identities when I interact with my friends or family, or people I do not know. When I am with people I call my friends, I behave differently, but when I’m with people I do not know, my character changes unconsciously into a more neutral personality in order to avoid conflict. This is something that exercising has not helped with. I have always been cautious with people I do not know, and very open with my friends and family.

In the last 3-4 years, I have become very sure of myself and who I am. Before I was very unsure and quiet, which makes me think that maybe now I would have had a different personality if it would not be for my friends in university, and for exercising regularly with my flag team.

1. http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20048389?pg=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.cabrini.edu/communications/ProfDev/cardevChickering.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.tlrp.org/capacity/rm/wt/hammersley/hammersley4.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/page.cfm?pageid=1386 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20048389 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/enFor>lightened-living/200910/examining-our-sense-identity-and-who-we-are [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/social-skills.html [↑](#footnote-ref-7)